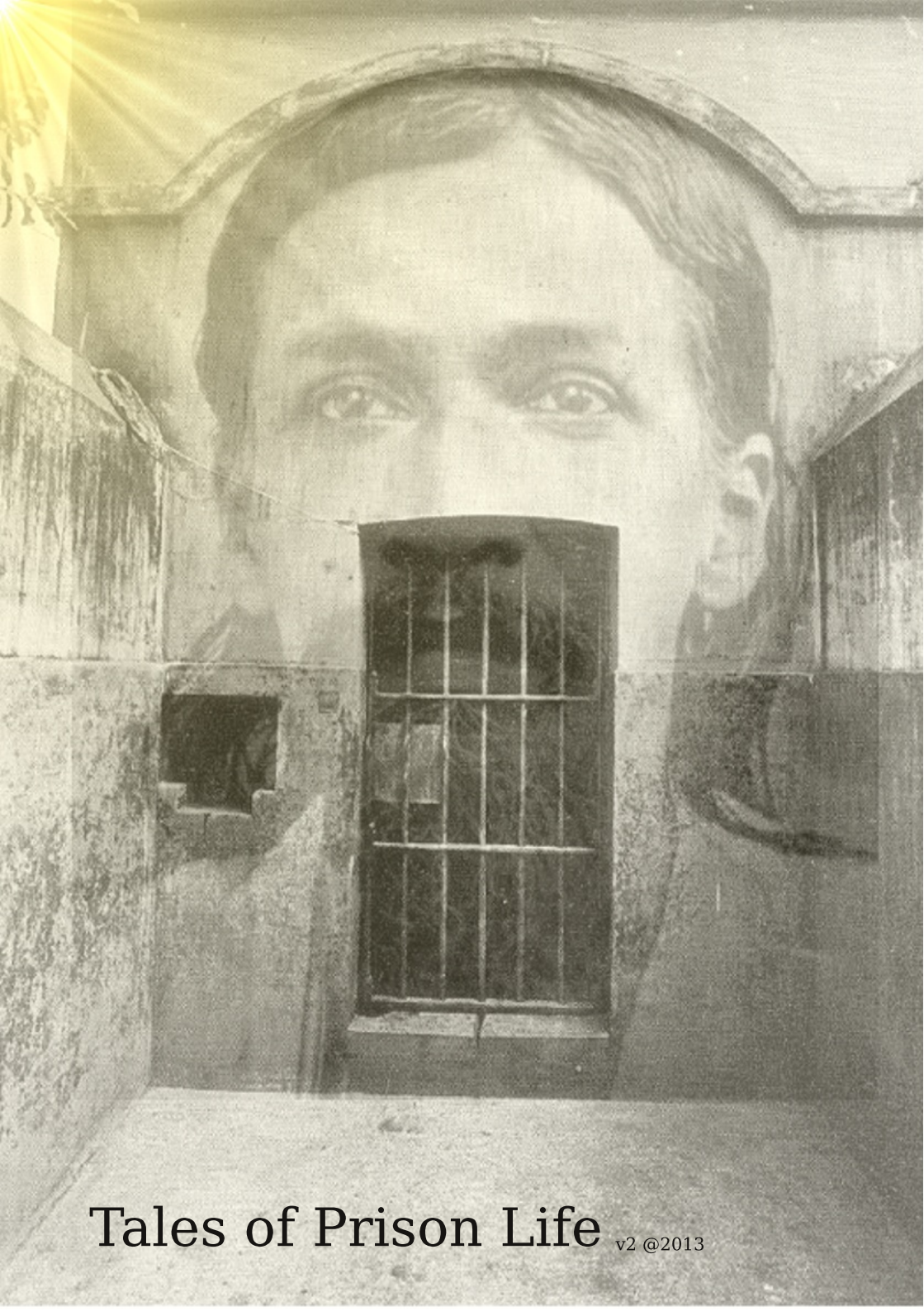




Tales of Prison Life v2 @2013

Tales of Prison Life v2 @2013

NEW translation of Sri Aurobindo's articles in Bengali, titled Karakahini, where he describes his experiences as an under-trial prisoner from 1908-09.

Context

Sri Aurobindo was arrested for conspiracy on 5th May 1908 and spent one full year in Alipore jail while the British Government, in a protracted court-trial (which came to be known as "Alipore Bomb Case"), tried to implicate him in various revolutionary activities. He was acquitted and released on 6th May 1909.

Subsequently he wrote a series of articles in the Bengali journal "Suprabhat", describing his life in prison and the courtroom. Sri Aurobindo made a brief mention in these articles of his spiritual experiences in Jail . Later he publicly spoke on the matter in the "Uttarpara Speech".

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Translator's Note:

Karakahini (Bengali) by Sri Aurobindo is a series of nine articles published in the Bengali monthly Suprabhat in 1909-10. This series remained incomplete as Sri Aurobindo left Bengal in 1910. Karakahini came out in book-form in 1920. It was later followed by an English translation titled "Tales of Prison Life". Both these books are © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

Tales of Prison Life _{v2 @2013} is a new and alternative English translation of Karakahini. It can be distinguished from the earlier translation by the presence of "v2 @2013" in the title.

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An offering at Thy feet..



Sri Aurobindo

As an under-trial prisoner in Alipore Jail in 1909

Thoughts and Aphorisms

When I was asleep in the Ignorance, I came to a place of meditation full of holy men and I found their company wearisome and the place a prison; when I awoke, God took me to a prison and turned it into a place of meditation and His trysting-ground.

Sri Aurobindo

The year of 1908, Friday, first of May. I was seated in the "Bande Mataram" office, when Shrijit Shyamsundar Chakravarty handed over a telegram from Muzaffarpur. I learnt from it of a bomb explosion in Muzaffarpur that had killed two European ladies. I further gathered from the day's issue of the "Empire" newspaper, that the Police Commissioner had claimed knowledge of the identity of the people involved in this murderous act and assured of their imminent arrest. I was not aware at the time that the prime suspect was none other than me and the Police investigation featured me as chief murderer as well as the initiator and secret leader of the young Nationalist revolutionaries. Nor did I know then that this day would mark the end of a chapter in my life, that there stretched before me a year's imprisonment during which period all bonds of a normal human life would be rent asunder and that for a whole year I would have to live outside human society, like a caged animal. And that my return to the field of action would not be as the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose but as a transformed being with a transformed character, a transformed intellect, a transformed life, a transformed mind, who would emerge from the Ashram at Alipore to continue the work on new lines. Though I have described it as imprisonment for a year, in effect it was a year's seclusion as in an *ashram* or hermitage. I had been making strong personal efforts since a long time for *sakshat darshan* (a direct vision) of the Lord of my heart and had nurtured an intense aspiration of knowing the Preserver of the world, *Purushottam* (the Supreme Person) as friend and master. But the pull of

worldly desires, attachment to various activities, and the thick veil of ignorance combined to prevent fulfilment. Finally the Compassionate, *Sarva-Mangalamaya Shri Hari* (All-Good Lord) removed at one stroke, all obstacles on my path towards him, brought me to a *yogashram* and Himself stayed as Guru and companion in that tiny *Sadhan-kutir* (seat of spiritual discipline). This *yogashram* happened to be the British prison. It is a strange contradiction of my life that the machinations of ill-wishing "enemies" - I still refer to them as "enemies" although it is no longer possible for me to consider anyone as such - has resulted in much greater benefit than the help provided by well-wishers. They intended to cause harm but the result was its opposite. The British Government's wrath had but one significant outcome: I found God.

This essay was not meant to be a historical record of my inner life during imprisonment; I merely wished to describe some of the outer events. However I thought it fit to begin the essay with a mention of the real essence of the prison-experiences - lest readers mistake suffering as the summary of my prison-life. Although it cannot be said of suffering, that there was none, the period, on the whole, passed in self-existent bliss.

On Friday night I had gone to sleep with a peaceful mind; at about five in the morning my sister anxiously rushed into the room and called out my name; this woke me up. The next moment the tiny room filled up with armed policemen: Superintendent Cregan, Clark *Saheb* of 24-Parganas, the familiar Sriman Benod Kumar Gupta, several other Inspectors, "red-turbans", spies and search witnesses. They all came charging in, pistols in hand, as if an all-conquering army of warriors charging forward to overrun, with guns and cannon, a secure fort. I heard that a heroic white man had pointed a pistol at my sister's breast, although I did not see this myself. As I sat up on my bed, still half-asleep, Cregan inquired, "*Who is Aurobindo Ghose, is that you?*" I answered, "*Yes. I am Aurobindo Ghose.*" He immediately ordered a policeman to put me under arrest. Then followed a brief but sharp verbal exchange with Cregan owing to his utterance of an extremely offensive expression. I then asked for the search warrant, read and signed it. I gathered from the reference to bombs in the warrant that the sudden arrival of this army of policemen was inter-linked with the 'Muzaffarpur killing'. However I failed to see why they could not wait till bombs or explosives were discovered at my house and had to go ahead with my arrest in the absence of a 'body-warrant'. I did not raise any futile objections on this account though. Immediately afterwards, I was handcuffed, as per Cregan's instructions, and a rope was tied around my waist. A *Hindustani* constable stood behind me holding the rope-end. At that point the police brought Shrijut Abinash Bhattacharya and

Shrijut Sailen Bose upstairs to my room, similarly handcuffed and with ropes tied around their waists. About half an hour later, they removed the rope and the handcuffs - I do not know at whose bidding this was done. Cregan's words, tone and behaviour revealed that he considered this akin to entering a lair of some wild ferocious beast; that he believed we were uneducated, violent, habitual-lawbreakers, and that it was unnecessary to speak or behave decently with us or show any basic courtesy. But subsequent to our earlier verbal duel the sahib appeared to soften a little. Benod *babu* tried to fill Cregan in on my background. Subsequently, Cregan asked me: "*It seems you are a B. A. Yet you sleep on the floor of an unfurnished room. Are you not ashamed that despite your educational qualifications, you dwell in such conditions?*". I said, "*I am a poor man, and I live like one.*" Cregan immediately responded in a loud voice, "*So have you worked up all this mischief with the aim of becoming rich?*". Considering the impossibility of explaining the import of patriotism, selflessness or a vow of poverty to this thick-headed Briton, I refrained from any such attempt.

The house-search had continued all this while. It had started at five-thirty and eventually ended at about eleven-thirty. Nothing - be it exercise books, letters, documents, scraps, poems, plays, prose, essays or translations - was left out of this all-encompassing house-search. Mr. Rakshit, a search-witness, seemed ill-at-ease; later, bemoaning his lot, he informed me that the police had dragged him along, without any prior intimation that he would have to be a party to

such a distasteful activity. He narrated, in a most pitiable manner, the story of his kidnapping. The attitude of the other witness, Samarnath, was quite different; he played out his part in the house-search as a true loyalist with great enthusiasm, as if to the manner born. There was no other mention-worthy event during the course of the search. But I recollect Mr. Clark examining the lump of earth from Dakshineshwar, preserved in a small cardboard box, with great suspicion; he suspected it might be some new and powerful explosive. In one sense, Mr. Clark's suspicions were not unfounded. Eventually it was concluded that the specimen was no different from normal earth and hence there was no need to send it for chemical analysis. I did not participate in the search except to open a few boxes. No documents or letters were shown or read out to me, except for one letter from Alakdhari, which Mr. Cregan read aloud for his own entertainment. Our friend, Benod Gupta, went marching around, shaking the room with each gentle foot-fall; he would bring out a document or letter from a shelf or some other place, and from time to time, exclaim "*Very important, very important*" and make an offering of it to Cregan. I was not made aware of what these "important" documents were. Nor did I have any curiosity in this regard, since I knew that it was impossible for any kind of formula for the manufacture of explosives or documents relating to conspiracy to exist in my house.

After turning my room inside-out the police moved on to the adjoining room. Cregan opened a box belonging to my youngest aunt, and after glancing at a

couple of letters, promptly concluded that there was no need of carrying away the women's correspondence. Then the police *mahatmas* descended to the ground floor. Cregan had his tea there. I had a cup of cocoa and toast. Cregan took this opportunity to impress his political views upon me through logical arguments - I remained unmoved and bore this mental torture without a word. Physical torture may be a long-standing police tradition, but may I ask if such inhuman mental torture too is within the ambit of its unwritten law? I hope our highly respectable well-wisher Srijut Jogeshchandra Ghose will take up this question in the Legislative Assembly.

After completing their search of the rooms on the ground floor and the office of "*Navashakti*", the police came up to the first floor again to open an iron safe belonging to "*Navashakti*". After struggling with the safe for half-an-hour, they decided to carry it away to the police station. At this point a police officer discovered a bicycle with a railway label bearing the name of "*Kushtia*". This was immediately assumed to be a vehicle belonging to the man who had earlier shot a *sahib* at "*Kushtia*" and the police gleefully took it away as a critical piece of evidence.

At about eleven-thirty we left our house. My maternal uncle and Srijut Bhupendranath Basu were waiting in a car just outside the gate. "*On what charges have you been arrested?*" my uncle asked. "*I know nothing about it,*" I answered. "*They charged into my room and arrested and handcuffed me; they did not produce a 'body-warrant'.*" When uncle inquired about the necessity of handcuffs, Benod *babu*

replied, "*Sir, it was not my fault. Ask Aurobindo babu, it was me who spoke to the Sahib to have the handcuffs removed.*" When Bhupen *babu* asked about my offence, Mr. Gupta mentioned the Indian Penal Code Section for murder; on hearing this, Bhupen *babu* was stunned and became speechless. Later on I came to know that my solicitor, Sri Hirendranath Datta, had expressed a desire to be present on my behalf during the house-search. But the police had turned down his request.

Benod *babu* was entrusted with the task of taking the three of us to the police station. His behaviour with us at the station was remarkably decent. We had our bath and lunch there and then proceeded towards Lal Bazar. We were made to wait there for a couple of hours and then moved to Royd Street; it was at this auspicious location that we spent the time till evening. Royd Street was the venue of my first meeting with Detective Maulvi Sams-ul-Alam and it was here that our cordial relationship had commenced. Maulvi Saheb had not yet acquired that much influence or zeal; he was not yet the chief researcher in the bomb case nor had he started functioning as Mr. Norton's prompter and unfailing human aide-memoire; Ramsadaya *babu* was still acting as the chief *panda* (broker) at that point. The Maulvi gave an exceedingly entertaining sermon on religion. That Hinduism and Islam have the same basic principles: in the *Om*kara of the Hindus we have the three syllables, A, U, M; the first three letters of the Holy Koran are A, L, M. According to philological laws, U may be used in place of L; ergo, Hindus and

Mussulmans have the same mantra or sacred syllables. Yet it is necessary to preserve the distinction between the faiths; hence it is condemnable for a Hindu to share a meal with a Mussulman. Truthfulness is another essential part of religion. The Sahibs say Aurobindo Ghose is the leader of a group of murderers; this is a matter of national shame and sorrow for all Indians. But by keeping to the path of truthfulness the situation can yet be saved. It was the *Maulvi's* strong belief, that distinguished persons, men of high character, like Bepin Pal and Aurobindo Ghose, would readily confess. Shrijut Purnachandra Lahiri, who happened to be present there, expressed his doubt in this regard. But the Maulvi did not give up his views. I was charmed and delighted with his knowledge, intelligence and religious ardour. Considering that it would be impertinent to speak much, I listened politely to his invaluable sermon and carefully etched it upon my heart. But in spite of his enthusiasm for religion, the Maulvi did not forget his role as a detective. At one point, he said: "*You made a great mistake in handing over the garden to your younger brother for the manufacture of bombs. It was not an intelligent move on your part.*" Understanding the implication of his words, I smiled a little, and replied: "*Sir, the garden is as much mine as my brother's. Where did you learn that I had given it up to him, or given it up to him for the purpose of manufacturing bombs?*" A little abashed, the Maulvi answered: "*No, no, I meant that just in case you have done such a thing.*" Then this Mahatama uncovered a page from the book of his life. He said, "*All moral or*

economic progress in my life can be traced back to a single sufficing principle of my father. He would always say, 'Never give up the food before you'. This great principle forms the sacred formula of my life; all that I have gained, I owe to this sage advice." At the time of saying this, the Maulvi stared at me so intently that it seemed as though I was his meal. In the evening, the redoubtable Ramasadaya Mukhopadhyaya appeared on the scene. He spoke words of unusual kindness and sympathy and told the people-in-charge to take care of my food and accommodation. Immediately afterwards, some people took Sailendra and me, through rain and storm, to the lock-up at Lal Bazar. This was the only meeting that I had with Ramasadaya. I could see the man was both intelligent and energetic, but his words and demeanour, his tone, his gait, all seemed fake and unnatural, as if he were acting on a stage. There are such men whose words, bodies, actions are an embodiment of untruth. They are experts in imposing themselves on immature, impressionable minds, but those who can read human character, find them out at once.

At Lal Bazar, the two of us were kept together in a spacious room on the first floor. Some snacks were served. After a while two Englishmen entered the room; later I was told that one of them was the Police Commissioner, Mr. Halliday, himself. Finding us both together Halliday was upset with the sergeant, and pointing towards me he said, "*Take care that nobody stays or speaks with this man.*" Sailen was taken away at once and locked up in another room. When all others had left, Halliday asked me: "*Are you not*

ashamed of your involvement in this cowardly, dastardly act?". I asked him in turn: "What right have you to assume that I was involved?". To this Halliday replied: "This is not my assumption; I know everything." I replied: "What you know or do not know is your concern. I completely deny having any connection whatsoever with this murderous act." Halliday said nothing more.

That night I had other visitors; all were members of the police force. This visit was part of a mystery that I have not been able to solve till date. A month and a half before my arrest, an unknown gentleman had met me and we had the following conversation. He said: *"Sir, we have not met earlier, but owing to the great respect I have for you, I come to warn you of impending danger. I wish to know if you are acquainted with anyone at Konnagar; have you ever visited the place or do you own a house there?"* "No, I do not own any house there," I said. *"But I have been there once and am known to some people there."* "I will say nothing more," said the stranger, *"but you should avoid meeting anyone from Konnagar after today. Some wicked people are conspiring against you and your brother, Barindra. Soon they will try to get you both into trouble. Please do not ask me anything more than this."* I told him: *"Sir, I am unable to understand how this information, without the complete details, has helped me, but since you came with friendly intentions, I thank you. I do not wish to know anything more. I have complete faith in God; His protection is with me, and hence any action or precaution from my side is unnecessary."* I heard no

more of this matter. But tonight it was proven that this unknown well-wisher had not been imagining things. An inspector and a few police officers came to elicit information regarding my connection with Konnagar. "*Are you originally from Konnagar?*" they asked. "*Have you ever visited the place? When was this? What was the purpose of the visit? Does Barindra own any property there?*" - they asked many such questions. I answered these in order to get at the root of the matter. But the attempt was not successful. However the nature of questions as well as the manner of the police inquiry indicated an attempt to verify information that had come into their possession. It was my guess that this matter was similar to the '*Tai-Maharaj*' case - where there had been an attempt to portray Tilak as a hypocrite, liar, cheat and tyrant, and the Bombay Government had misutilized public money by participating in the attempt - and that there appeared to be a deliberate plot to falsely implicate me.

The whole of Sunday was spent in the lock-up. There was a staircase in front of my room. In the morning I saw a few young lads coming down the stairs. Their faces were unfamiliar, but I guessed that they must have been arrested in the same case. Later I came to know that these were the lads from the Manicktola Gardens. A month later, I made their acquaintance in jail. A little later I too was taken downstairs for a wash - since there was no arrangement for a bath, I went without it. Pulses and boiled rice were on offer for lunch that day - I forced myself to swallow a few morsels, following which I

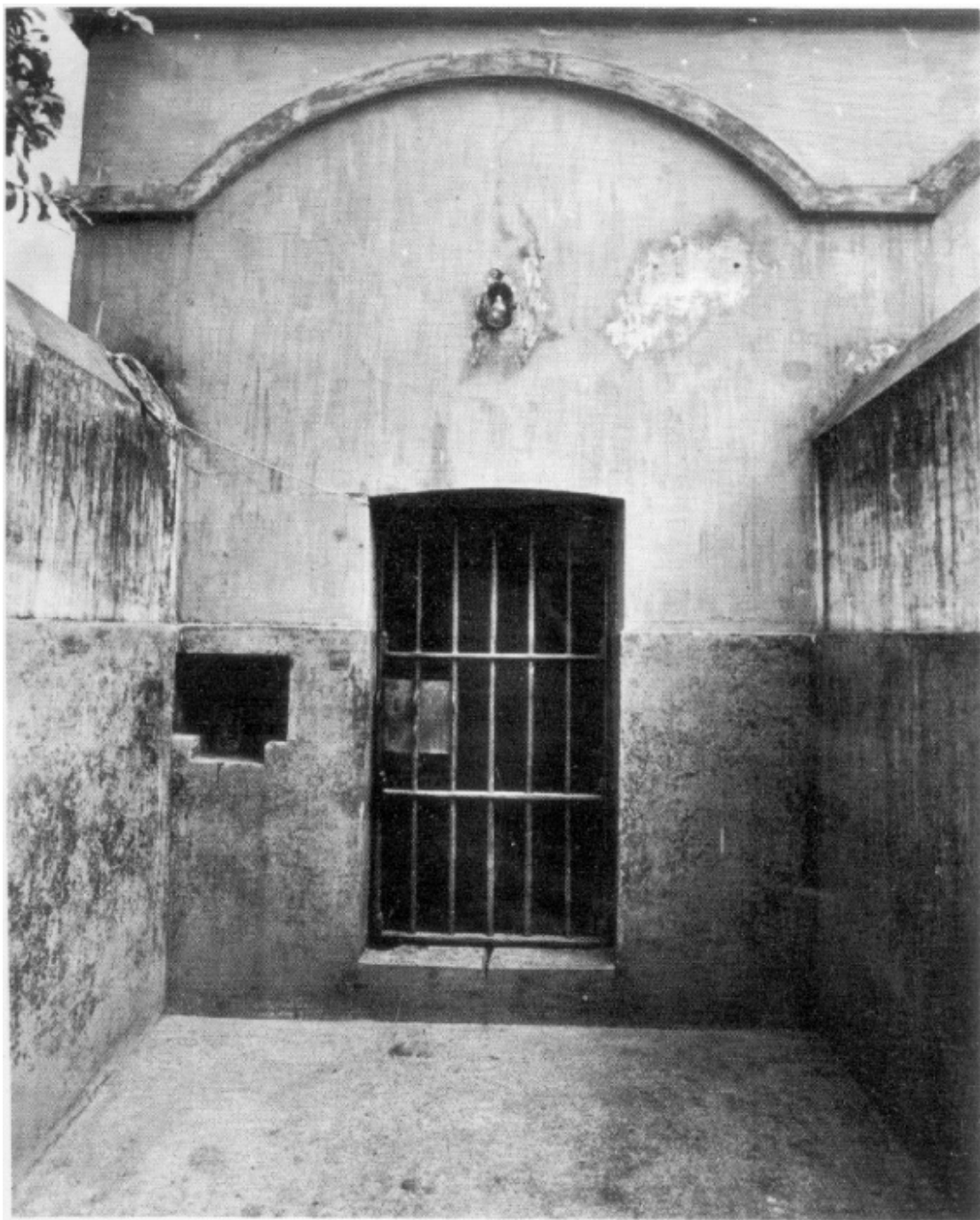
abandoned the effort. In the evening we had puffed rice. This was our diet for three days. But I must also add that on Monday, the sergeant, on his own, allowed me to have tea and toast.

Later I learnt that my lawyer had sought permission from the Commissioner to have my food sent from home, but Mr. Halliday did not agree to this. I also heard that the accused were forbidden to consult their lawyers or attorneys. It is not known if this restriction was legally valid or not. Although a lawyer's advice would have been useful for me, it was not quite necessary; but for many of the accused, this restriction did have an adverse impact on their cases. On Monday we were presented before the Commissioner. Abinash and Sailen were with me. We were taken in different groups. As the three of us had prior experience of being arrested and had some familiarity with the legal complexities, we refused to make any statements before the Commissioner. Next day we were taken to the magistrate, Mr. Thornhill's court. It was there that I met Shrijut Kumar Krishna Datta, Mr. Manuel, and one of my relatives for the first time. Mr. Manuel asked me, *"The police claims that a great deal of written material has been found at your house that provides ground for suspicion. Were such documents or letters really there?"* I told him, *"I can say without doubt that there was nothing; for it is not possible."* Of course, at that point, I did not know of the "sweets letter" or of the "scribblings". I told my relative: *"Please tell everyone back home that there is no cause for fear or worry; my innocence will be proven completely."* A firm belief had taken birth in me right then that it would

indeed be so. During solitary imprisonment the mind did become restless at first. But after three days of prayer and meditation, an immobile peace and unshakable faith was again established in the being.

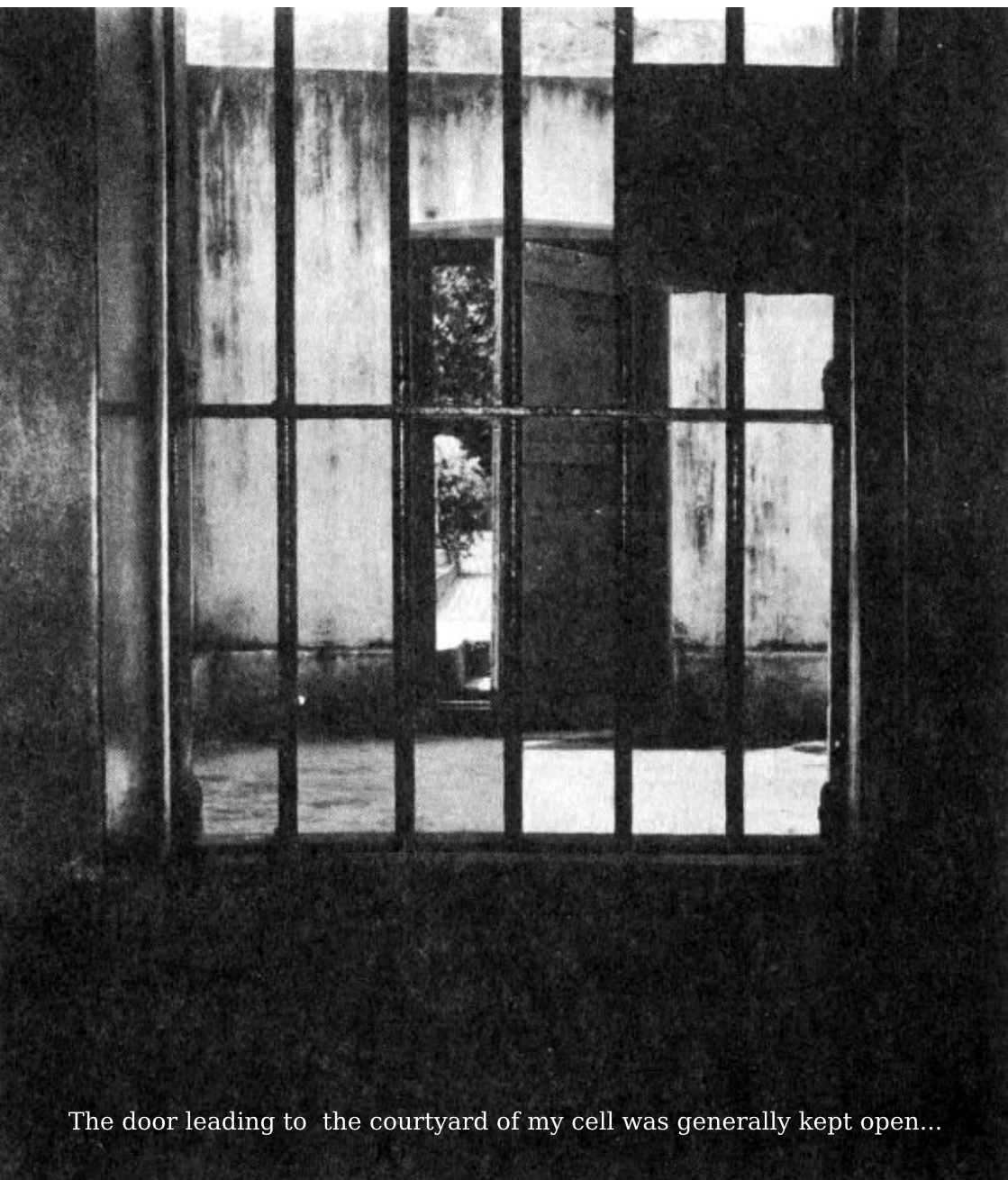
From Mr. Thornhill's court we were taken in a carriage to Alipore. This group included Nirapada, Dindayal, Hemchandra Das amongst others. I had prior acquaintance with Hemchandra Das as I had once put up at his place in Midnapore. It would have been difficult to imagine then that our next meeting would be under such circumstances - as prisoners on way to the jail. We made a brief stop-over at the Alipore magistrate's court; the purpose was not to present us before the Magistrate but to obtain a signed order. We again got into the carriage; a gentleman came near me and said, *"I have information that they are planning solitary confinement for you and orders are being passed to that effect. They will probably not allow any one to see or meet you. If you wish to share anything with your family, I can convey your message to them."* I thanked him, but since I had already conveyed my message through my relative, I did not have anything more to say to him. I mention this event merely as an example of my countrymen's sympathy and unsought kindness towards me. Thereafter we were taken to the jail and handed over to the Jail staff. Before entering the jail precincts we were given a bath and made to put on the prison uniform, whilst our clothes including shirts, dhotis and kurtas, were taken away for laundry. The bath, after a gap of four days, felt like heavenly bliss. After the bath, they took us to our respective cells. I entered my bare cell,

and the barred-door closed behind me. My prison life at Alipore began thus on May 5th. Next year, on May 6th, I was acquitted.



This windowless cage fronted by a large iron barred-door, was now my appointed abode...

My prison-cell was nine feet in length and about five or six feet in width. This windowless cage fronted by a large iron barred-door, was now my appointed abode. The cell opened into a very small courtyard, paved with stones and surrounded by a high brick wall. A wooden door led outside. The door had a small peep-hole at eye-level, for sentries to keep a periodic watch on the convicts when the door was closed. The door to my courtyard was generally kept open. There were six such contiguous cells known as the '*six decrees*'. The word 'decree' was a reference to the cells reserved for special forms of punishment - those who were sentenced to solitary imprisonment by the Judge or the Jail Superintendent, would serve out their terms in these tiny, cramped cells. There were varying degrees of severity even in solitary confinement though. Those who were punished severely had their courtyard doors kept shut; thus deprived of human company, the vigilant eyes of the sentry and the arrival of fellow-convicts twice a day to deliver meals, would serve as their only living contact with the outside world. The CID (Criminal Investigation Department) appeared to be even more terror-stricken by Hemchandra Das than me and hence arranged for him to receive this severe form of punishment. There was a yet higher severity of punishment - solitary confinement with one's hands and feet bound in handcuffs and shackles. This severest form of punishment was inflicted not only for acts of physical violence or breaking the peace but also for slackness or repeated mistakes in prison labour. It was against the law to put under-trial prisoners in solitary



The door leading to the courtyard of my cell was generally kept open...

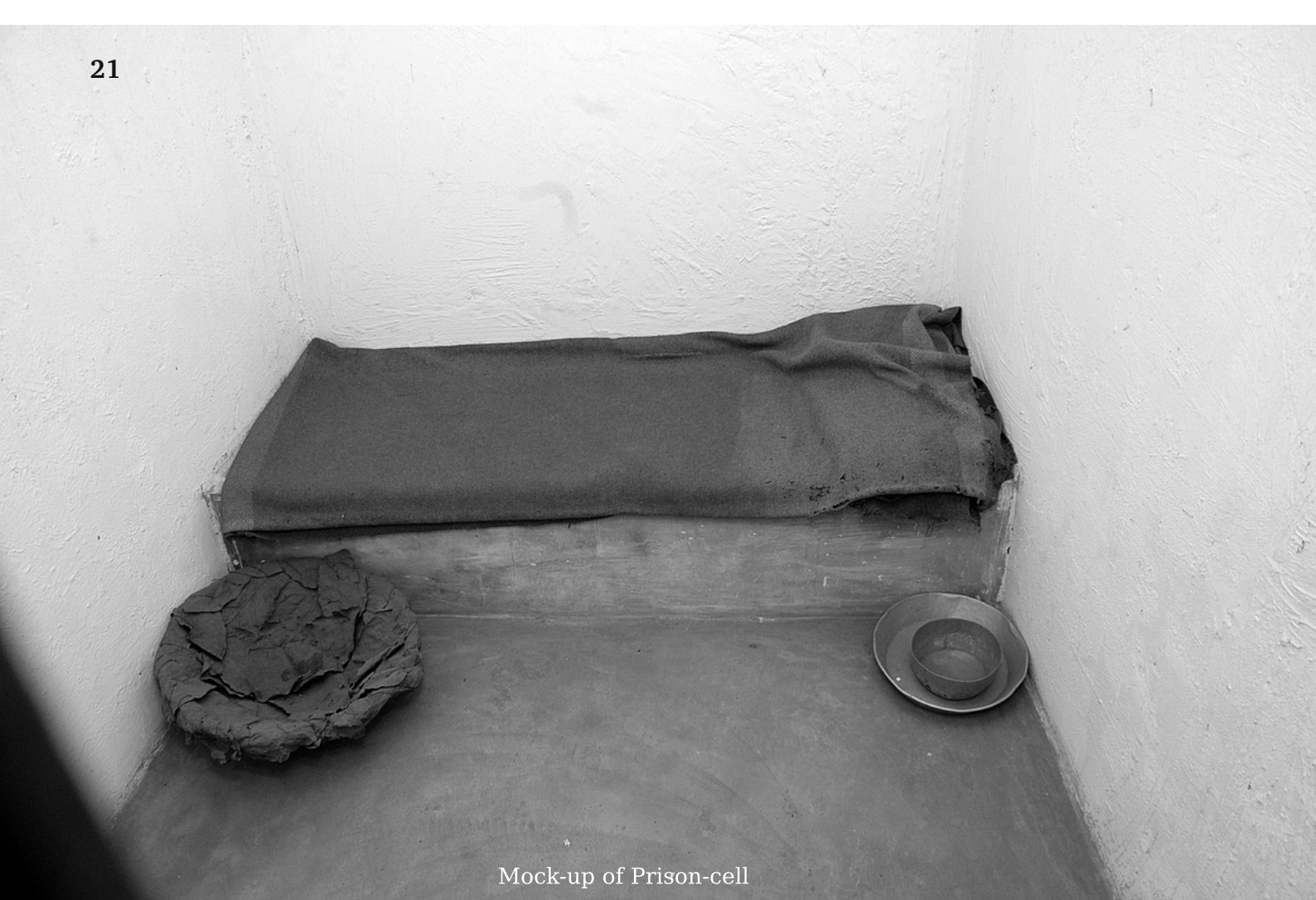
confinement and torture them thus, but the matter of those accused in affairs related to the Swadeshi movement or '*Bande Mataram*', was apparently outside the purview of law and hence such arrangements were promptly made for them as desired by the Police.

The impeccable standard of hospitality manifest in arrangements for our accommodation, was maintained, by the generosity of the authorities, in the matter of furnishings too. The bare courtyard was adorned with a single plate and a single bowl. Once scoured with suitable care, this representative sum of my material possessions - the plate and the bowl - would shine ever-so brightly that the silver-like lustre would simply melt one's heart; and taking the faultless, glowing radiance as symbolic of the 'heaven-like' perfection of the British Monarchy, I would savour the pure bliss of loyalty to the Crown. The only fault was that the plate too, in communion with my state, would swell up with this pure bliss; in this bloated state, the slightest pressure of the fingers, would send it spinning like the Whirling Dervishes of Arabia. And then one would have no option but to use one hand to hold the plate in position and the other for eating; otherwise the plate would continue its spinning motion and attempt to escape with my portion of the incomparable prison-food. The bowl turned out to be even more precious and useful than the plate. Amongst inanimate objects, the bowl was as if a British civilian. In the same manner as a civilian is possessed of inborn skills and capabilities for all professions and can become a judge or a magistrate or a police officer or a



Mock-up of Prison-cell

revenue officer or a chairman of municipality or a professor or a preacher at a moment's notice - just as an investigator, prosecutor, police magistrate, even at times the defence counsel can all happily co-exist in one single body of a civilian - my bowl too was possessed of the same qualities. The bowl bore no distinction of caste or creed; in the prison cell I used it in the act of ablution and then used it for washing and bathing; a little later, during meal-time, lentil soup or cooked vegetable was served in it; I drank water out of it and rinsed my mouth from it as well. Such an immensely-valuable, all-purpose object can exist only in a British prison. The bowl, besides serving all my worldly needs, became a means of *Yoga-sadhana*(spiritual discipline) as well. It would be difficult to find an aid and means such as this to rid oneself of the sense of repulsion. Subsequent to the first phase of solitary imprisonment, when all under-trial prisoners were staying together, my civilian's rights were fulfilled differently - the authorities had arranged for a separate receptacle for the privy. But for a month-long period before that, the arrangement with the bowl provided an unsought lesson in the control of one's sense of disgust. The entire arrangement for excretion was apparently designed to enable this lesson. Solitary imprisonment is supposedly a special form of punishment, predicated on the deprivation of human company and curtailment of freedom to breathe freely under the open skies, to the extent possible. As arrangements for excretion outside the cell would violate these sacred principles, two tar-coated baskets were provided in the cell itself.



Mock-up of Prison-cell

The sweepers (*mehtar*) would clean the baskets in the mornings and evenings. Intense exhortations or soul-melting entreaties could get them to clean the baskets at other times too; however answering nature's call outside the routine would often be followed by a period of repentance, as one had to suffer the noxious smell, for a few hours at least. In the second phase of solitary confinement, there were some reforms in this respect; but British reforms mean complete preservation of the principles of the older system and some tweaking of the administrative aspects. It is needless to say that such arrangements in a small cell caused great discomfort - especially during meals and at night. One is aware that attached toilets, in many parts of the world, are considered an integral part of western culture; but one tiny cell serving as bedroom, dining-room and toilet - this was simply too much of a good thing! We Indians with our primitive customs find it painful to attain such higher rungs of civilization.

The other household utilities comprised of a small-sized bucket, a tin-container for water and two prison-issued blankets. The bucket was kept in the courtyard and I would take my bath there. I did not experience scarcity of water initially, as I did later on. In the beginning, the convict in the adjacent cowshed would fill up the bucket as many times as I wanted during my bath; hence bathing-time became a respite from the prison austerities, providing a daily opportunity to indulge in a householder's simple pleasures. The other convicts were not so fortunate - a single bucketful of water was all they had for

performing ablutions, cleaning of utensils and bathing. Such extraordinary luxury though was permitted to only the under-trial prisoners - the other convicts had no more than a few bowls of water for their bathing. The British perhaps held the belief that *Bhagwat Prem*(love for God) and personal hygiene were equivalent and equally rare virtues; but it was difficult to conclude whether the prison regulations were designed to protect the sanctity of this belief or to prevent a break in the happy rhythm of the forced austerities of a convict's prison life by a surfeit of bathing pleasures. The convicts on their part brushed-off the magnanimity of the Authorities and described the affair as '*kaak-snan*' (crow-like bathing). It is the very nature of man to be easily discontented after all. The arrangement for drinking water outclassed the bathing facilities. It was summertime; my tiny cell was as if a forbidden zone for the breeze. But the fierce, blazing sun had unrestricted access to it. The cell would become a veritable oven. Thus being roasted alive, the only way to lessen one's unquenchable thirst was to drink the tepid water in the tin-container. I would repeatedly drink this lukewarm water, but the thirst would not be quenched; instead there would follow heavy sweating and a renewal of the thirst in greater measure. Some convicts though had access to earthen pots placed in their courtyards; such convicts would feel blessed and attribute this to forgotten *tapasya*(austerities) of some past-life. This compelled even the most ardent believers in the efficacy of human effort to admit of destiny; it could only be fate that a random group of convicts had cool water to

drink whilst others remained ever-thirsty. The authorities though were completely impartial in the distribution of tin-containers and earthen water-pots. Notwithstanding the matter of my satisfaction (or lack of it) with such whimsical arrangements, the kind-hearted prison doctor found my thirst-related difficulties rather unbearable. He tried to arrange for me to get an earthen pot, but since the matter was not under his supervision, his efforts did not bear fruit for a long time; eventually, at his behest, the head-sweeper did discover an earthen pot. By this time, I had, in the course of a long and intense struggle, attained to thirstlessness. In these furnace-like cells, two thick blankets of prison-issue served as our bed. As there was no pillow, I would spread out one blanket and fold the other and use it as a pillow. When the heat became unbearable, I would roll on the ground to cool the body and get some relief. In this way I came to know the joy of Mother Earth's embrace and her cooling touch. But the hardness of the floor made it difficult to fall sleep; hence I had to take the help of the blanket. A spell of rain would bring with it great joy and relief. The only inconvenience in such weather was that in case of thunder-storms, the *tandava nritya* (violent dance) of the tempest would be accompanied by a small-scale flood in my cell. On such occasions, I would have no option but to retreat to one corner of the cell with my wet blanket at night. And even when the play of nature ceased, one would have to wait for the cell-floor to become sufficiently dry and abandoning all hope of sleep until that happened, one would have to seek refuge in past memories. The only

dry area would be near the receptacles for excretion but I would not feel inclined towards spreading my blanket in that area. In spite of such inconveniences, the rainy weather brought with it the cool breeze, that provided relief from the furnace-like heat in the cell. Hence I whole-heartedly welcomed the rain and storm.

The description of the Alipore Government Hotel I have provided so far, and intend to provide in the future, is not meant to publicise my personal suffering; the objective was to bring to light the wondrous arrangements made for under-trial prisoners in the civilised British Raj, and the prolonged agony that innocent people undergo as a consequence. There was indeed cause for suffering, but due to Divine Grace, I was affected only for the first few days; thereafter - by what means I shall mention later - the mind transcended these sufferings and grew incapable of feeling any hardship. This is why memories of prison life, when they re-surface, evoke a smile instead of rancour or sorrow. When I had first entered my cage dressed in the strange prison uniform and observed the conditions of our prison-stay, I had felt the same way and had started smiling within myself. An earlier study of the history of the English people and their conduct in modern times had given me a deep insight into their strange and mysterious ways. So their behaviour and attitude towards me did not cause any surprise or disconcertment. To the normal vision, their conduct towards us would appear extremely mean and reprehensible. All of us were gentlemen; many were scions of *Zamindars*; some were, in terms of their

lineage, education, qualities and character, the equal of the highest classes in England. We were not charged with ordinary crimes like murder, theft or dacoity but stood accused of insurrection to liberate the country from foreign rulers or conspiracy for armed revolution. Even in the matter of these charges, there was a complete absence of evidence and proof against many of the accused and arrests had been made entirely on the basis of suspicion. The manner in which they treated us - like ordinary thieves and dacoits in a prison, nay, like animals in a cage, serving food unfit for consumption even by animals, making us endure scarcity of water, thirst, hunger, the sun, the rain and the cold - did not enhance in any way the prestige of the British race or its imperial officers. This was actually a defect in the character of the British race. Although the English exhibit some qualities of a *Kshatriya*, they are like calculating businessmen in dealing with enemies or opponents. At the time though, I did not feel any aversion to this; on the contrary, I felt a little happy that no distinction was made between myself and the common uneducated masses of our country; primarily, this arrangement served as a sacrificial offering at the altar of *Matribhakti* (love of the Motherland). On my part, I accepted this as a unique means and conducive conditions for *yoga-sadhana* and transcending the sense of duality. Further, as a member of the group of extremists, I subscribed to their belief that democracy and equality between the rich and the poor were essential constituents of the spirit of Nationalism. I recalled how we had tried to apply these principles in

practical life by ensuring that everyone travelled in the third-class compartments on our way to the Surat Conference; in the camp, as leaders, we did not make separate arrangements but slept in the same room as everyone else. The rich and poor, the Brahmins, the Vaishya, the Shudra, the Bengali, the Maratha, the Punjabi, the Gujarati - came together in a divine sense of brotherhood and ate, slept and lived in the same manner. We slept on the ground and ate rice-pulses-curd - the highest form of *Swadeshi* found expression in all matters. The 'foreign-returned' from Bombay and Calcutta and the *Brahmin* from Madras with his *tilak* (sandal-mark on forehead) intermixed freely. During my stay in the Alipore Jail, when I received the same treatment as my fellow convicts, as my fellow countrymen - farmers, iron-mongers, potters, the *doms* and the *bagdis* - in matters of food, accommodation and prison regulations, I felt as if Narayana, the Supreme Lord who resides within each of us, had put His seal of sanction on my *jivan brata* (the guiding principle of life) and accepted our practice of equality, unity, and nation-wide brotherhood. A day will dawn when people of all classes in my country will band together as one living mass at the sacred altar of the World-Mother, represented here by our Motherland and face the rest of world with heads held high; a thrill of joy ran through me on many an occasion as I previsioned the arrival of that auspicious day in the love of my fellow accused and prisoners and the British administrator's practice of equality towards us. The other day I noticed that the Indian Social Reformer, from Poona, had picked up a simple and easily-comprehensible

sentence from my writings and sarcastically commented thus: "It seems that nearness of God is all too common in prison!". Alas, the reformist human ego and its pettiness and arrogance induced of imperfect knowledge and imperfect virtues! If God were not to manifest in prisons, in huts, in ashrams, in the hearts of the miserable, then should He manifest in the luxurious palaces of the rich or the comfortable beds of pleasure-seeking, ego-blinded worldly folk? God does not care for scholarly-learning, social standing, prestige, popularity, outward show and sophistication. He always reveals Himself to the miserable in the form of the Compassionate Mother. The Lord resides in the heart of those who can envision *Narayana* in all men, in all races, in the mother-land, in the miserable, the poor, the fallen and the sinner and thus seeing, dedicate their lives in the service of the *Narayana* of their vision. And amidst a fallen race that is preparing to rise again, a desh-sevak's solitary prison-cell is where nearness of God becomes possible and indeed common.

Once the jailor had seen to the blankets, plate and bowl and left, I sat myself on the blankets and began to observe the prison-scene. This prison cell appeared better to me than the lock-up at Lal Bazar. There the silence in the huge hall seemed to spread out infinitely and extend the silence. Here the walls of the tiny room seemed to come closer, like friends eager to gather me in a *Brahmamaya* embrace. There the high windows of the second storey room did not even offer a glimpse of the sky and sometimes it became difficult to imagine that trees and plants, men,

animals, birds and houses existed in the outside world. In the prison, since the door to my courtyard remained open, I could sit beside the bars and observe the open spaces outside and the passage of the prisoners. Alongside the courtyard wall stood a tree - its eye-soothing verdancy was at once rejuvenating and precious. The sentry, who did his rounds in front of the '*six decree*' rooms, his face and footsteps would often appear as dear and comforting as those of a close friend in his ambulation. The prisoners in the neighbouring cowshed would pass in front of my cell daily as they took their cows out for grazing. The daily sight of the cow and cowherd was an unending source of joy. The solitary confinement at Alipore gave me an unique lesson in love. Earlier, my personal affection was confined to a rather small circle of human-beings and the emotion of love would rarely flow out towards birds and animals. I recalled a poem by *Rabi babu* where he beautifully describes a village boy's deep love for a buffalo. I did not appreciate the poem when I first read it as the description seemed to me, to suffer from exaggeration and artificiality. However if I read that poem now I would see it in a different light. At Alipore I realized that a man's heart could nourish the deepest love for all living beings such that the very sight of even a cow, a bird or an ant could move him to the core of his being and set him throbbing with an intense delight.

The first day in prison passed off peacefully. Everything appeared new and filled the heart with energy. In comparison with the Lal Bazar lock-up, the present circumstances made me feel better. My faith in

God did not allow me to feel lonely. The strange appearance of the prison food did not disturb my equanimity either. Coarse-grained rice, seasoned variously with husk, foreign particles, insects, hair, dirt amongst other things; tasteless *dal* (pulses) with most parts water; vegetables in the form of leafy greens and *shak* (herbs) - I could have hardly imagined before this that human food could be so tasteless and devoid of nutritive value. I was sufficiently appalled at the dark unappealing appearance of *shak*; and after just two mouthfuls, I bid it a respectful goodbye and shunned it subsequently. All prisoners were served the same *shak*, and any such vegetable once introduced in the menu was persisted with endlessly. We were currently witness to the reign of *shak*. Days turned into fortnights, and fortnights turned into months and yet the same fare comprising *shak*, lentils and rice was served up day after day. Not only did the menu remain unchanged, the appearance too did not undergo the slightest variation; the same everlasting, eternal, immutable, unique form was preserved throughout. This experience, even if for a couple of days, was adequate to convince the prisoners of the stability of this transient illusory world (*Maya-jagat*). I turned out to be more fortunate than the other prisoners in this matter too, due to the doctor's kindness. He had arranged a supply of milk from the hospital for me; hence, I enjoyed a respite from the daily encounter with *shak*, for some days at least.

That night I went to bed early, but peaceful undisturbed sleep was not an acceptable part of solitary imprisonment, lest it awaken within prisoners

a desire for other such pleasures. Hence during the change of sentry-duty, as a rule, the prisoner was repeatedly called without respite until a vocal response was elicited. Many of the sentries, assigned to the '*six decree*' cells, were remiss in the application of this rule - in fact, kindness and sympathy was more prevalent than a cold, rigid sense of duty amongst the sentries - to be more specific, the *Hindustani* nature was generally like this. Some, of course, were not so considerate. They would wake us up as described and inquire about our well-being: "*How do you do, Sir?*" This untimely concern for our health was not always welcome, but I realized that some sentries were simply following the rule in this respect. Initially I put up with this in spite of the annoyance; eventually I resorted to scolding them to protect my sleep. After repeating this rebuke for some days, I noticed that the custom, of making health-enquiries in the night, ceased on its own.

Next morning the prison bell rang at 4:15 am. This was the first bell to wake-up the prisoners. After a few minutes the bell rang out again; at this the prisoners came out in a single-file, washed-up, swallowed the *lufsi*(prison gruel) and commenced the day's labour. I too woke up, realizing the impossibility of sleeping amidst the continual ringing of the prison bell. The barred-door to my cell was opened at five; after freshening up I returned to my cell. A little later *lufsi* appeared at my door but I was content with only a visual introduction that day and made no attempt at consuming it. It was only after a few days that I first indulged in this highest form of delicacy. *Lufsi* meant

boiled rice, along with its starch; this constituted the prisoner's meagre breakfast. *Lufsi* was a trinity i.e. it had three forms. On the first day, *Lufsi* was presented in its *Prajna* aspect - unmixed original elements, pure, holy, Shiva-like. On the second day it was presented in its *Hiranyagarbha* aspect - boiled along with lentils, named *khichuri*, a yellowish admixture. On the third day, *lufsi* appeared in its *Virat* aspect - with a touch of jaggery, greyish in form, closer to being fit for human consumption. I shunned the *Prajna* and the *Hiranyagarbha* aspects after concluding that their consumption was beyond the capacity of mere mortals; but once in a while, I swallowed miniscule portions of the *Virat* aspect and then lost myself in wonderment and joyful reflection of the many-splendoured virtues of British rule and the high level of humanitarianism manifest in Western culture. It is mention-worthy that *lufsi* was the only nutritious food-item for the Bengali prisoners as the rest had no food-value. But that did not mean much in itself. For such was the taste that one could eat it only out of sheer hunger; even then, one had to coax and force oneself to swallow it.

That day I took my bath at half past eleven. For the first four or five days, I had to wear the same clothes in which I had left home. An old prisoner-warder from the cowshed had been appointed to look after me at the time of bathing. He managed to procure a piece of coarse cloth, which was a yard and half long. I covered myself with this during the time it took for my only set of clothes to be washed and dried. I did not have to wash my clothes or clean my dishes; a prisoner in the cowshed did that for me. Lunch was at

eleven. In order to avoid the proximity of the baskets provided for excretion, I would often prefer to eat outside in the courtyard, in spite of the intense summer heat. The sentries did not object to this. The evening meal was between five and five-thirty pm. It was mandatory to keep the cage-door closed after this time. The evening bell rang at seven. The chief supervisor gathered the prisoner-warders together and called out the names of the inmates in a loud voice; after this each would return to their respective posts. The tired prisoners would then take refuge in sleep - the only source of pleasure or respite in the prison. This was the time when the weak-hearted wept over their current misfortunes or in apprehension of future hardships in prison. The lover of God though felt the nearness of his deity and experienced joy through prayer or meditation in the silence of the night. When night fell, this massive torture-chamber, in the form of Alipore Jail, along with its inmates - three thousand of God's creatures: the unfortunate, the fallen, the victims of an imperfect society - was immersed in a vast silence.

I would rarely meet the co-accused convicts in prison. They had been confined in a separate area. There were two rows of tiny cells behind the '*six decrees*', making up a total of forty-four cells; hence this was known as the '*forty-four decrees*'. Most of the accused convicts were put-up in cells in one such row. Although thus confined to the cells, they did not have to experience the suffering of solitary imprisonment since three persons were accommodated in each cell. On the other side of the prison there was another



Part of '44 decrees', Alipore Jail

decree, with a few large rooms; these could accommodate as many as twelve persons. The prisoners who were held in this decree were much better-off. Many were indeed confined in a cell in this decree - they had freedom to engage in conversation and enjoy human companionship. However there was one amongst them who was deprived of this pleasure. This was Hemchandra Das. I do not know why the authorities were especially afraid of or upset with him and had singled him out for solitary confinement. Hemchandra himself believed that since the police had failed to extract a confession from him, in spite of endless efforts, their frustration had changed into wrath. He was confined to a tiny cell in the decree and the courtyard door was kept closed. I have already mentioned that this was the severest form of this type of punishment. From time to time the police would produce witnesses of varying types, colours and shapes and conduct an identification parade which would be nothing more than a charade. On such occasions we would be lined up in a row in front of the office. The prison authorities would then intermix other convicts with us and present the mixed lot for identification. But this was only in theory. The other convicts were neither educated nor gentlemanly, and when we stood by their side in a single row, there was a visible difference between the two kinds of convicts. On one hand we had the bright faces and sharp features of the young men accused of the bomb conspiracy, clearly expressive of intelligence and personality and on the other hand, we had the soiled clothes and lustreless visage of the average convict.

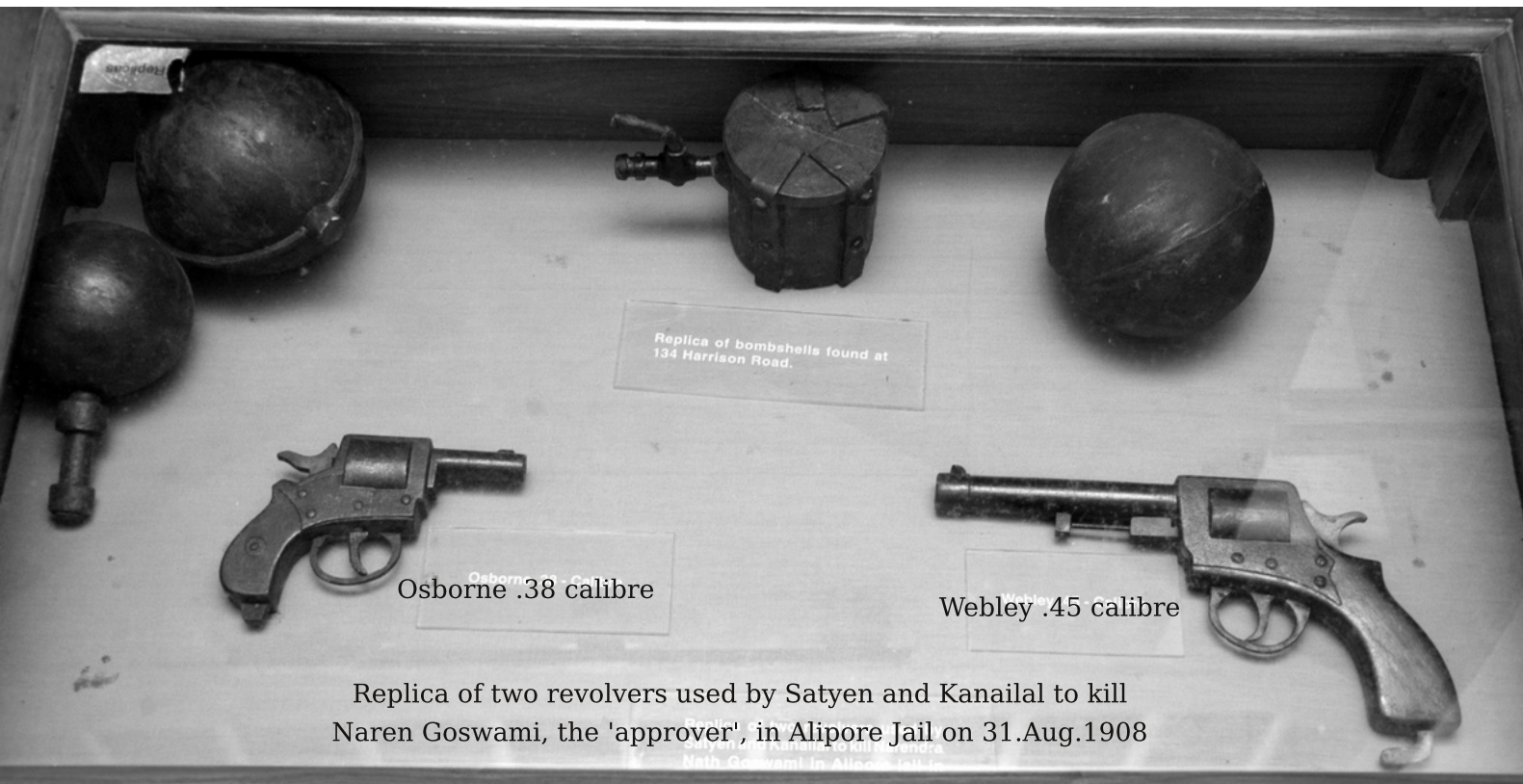
Only a person bereft of human intelligence could miss this glaring contrast and fail to distinguish between the two categories of convicts. The prisoners were not however averse to the identification parade. It provided a welcome break from the monotonous routine of prison life and provided a chance to exchange a few words amongst themselves. After our arrest, it was during one such identification parade that I first met my brother, Barindra, though we did not speak at that time. It was Narendranath Goswami who often stood by my side, so I had an opportunity to make his acquaintance. Goswami was extremely handsome, tall, fair, strong and well-built, but his eyes betrayed ill-intentions and his words too were not indicative of intelligence. In this respect, he presented a contrast to the other young-men. Their faces reflected pure and high thoughts and their words expressed a keen intelligence, a love of knowledge and noble selfless aspirations. But though Gossain came across as a foolish and a light-minded person, his words expressed vigour and boldness. At that time he was convinced that he would be acquitted. He would say: *"My father is an expert in litigation, the police will not be able to thwart him. My confession too will not go against me, for it will be proven that the police had extracted the confession from me through physical torture."* I asked him, *"Where are your witnesses that the police did as you claim?"* Gossain answered unabashed: *"My father has conducted hundreds of such cases; he knows this game very well. There will be no lack of witnesses"*. These are the kind of people who turn into 'approvers'.

The needless difficulties and various hardships experienced by the accused have been described earlier but it is necessary to mention that all of this originated from defects in the Prison System itself; none of these sufferings could be attributed to any individual's cruelty or lack of human qualities. In fact the persons responsible for administration in Alipore Jail were all quite decent, kind and conscientious. If the prisoner's suffering has been lessened in any jail and the inhuman barbarity of the European prison system ameliorated through kindness and conscientiousness, then it is in Alipore Jail and under Mr. Emerson's administration that this 'best from the worst' has emerged. This has been made possible, primarily, by the extraordinary qualities exhibited by its Superintendent, Mr. Emerson, and the assistant doctor, Baidyanath Chatterji. One of them was an embodiment of Europe's almost-extinct Christian ideals, and the other was a personification of the charity and philanthropy that form the essence of Hinduism. The likes of Mr. Emerson no longer frequent this country; they are getting rarer even in the West. All the virtues of a quintessential Christian gentleman were to be found in him. He was peace-loving, just and incomparably generous and charitable; he was fundamentally incapable of anything but polite conduct towards all without exception; he was but a simple man, characterized by rectitude and self-restraint. Among his shortcomings were lack of energy and administrative efficiency; he would let the jailor manage the entire workload, himself remaining a *roi faineant*. I do not believe this caused any great degree

of harm though. The jailor, Jogendra *babu*, was a capable and efficient man; in spite of being seriously handicapped by diabetes, he would personally supervise all activities and ensure justice and the absence of cruelty in the jail, in accordance with Mr Emerson's wishes. He was not a great soul like Emerson but an average Bengali gentleman, employed in Government service, who kept the Sahib in humour, performed his job efficiently and dutifully and treated others with a natural politeness and decency - I did not observe any special quality in him other than this. He had a great fondness for his Government service. It was then the month of May and the time for his pension was drawing near; he was looking forward to a long, well-earned rest after January as a pensioner. But the sudden appearance of the accused in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy had caused much fear and cogitation in Jogendra *babu's* mind. *'It was difficult to predict what calamitous events could be precipitated by these irrepressible and energetic Bengali boys'* - this apprehension made him restless. He would say: *'There was only an inch and a half of distance to cover to reach the top of the palm tree; but he had succeeded in negotiating only half of that distance'*. Towards the end of August Mr. Buchanan had returned satisfied from his prison inspection. The jailor said joyfully, *"This is the Sahib's last visit during my term of office - there is no cause for worry about my pension now."* Alas, for human blindness! The poet has aptly said: Providence has provided two great aids to the suffering race of man. First, our future has been kept a mystery; secondly, man has been endowed with blind

hope as his support and consolation in dealing with this. It was just four or five days after the Jailor's reasoned assessment that Naren Gossain lost his life at Kanai's hands, and Buchanan's visits to the prison grew increasingly frequent. The result was that Jogen *babu* lost his job before time, and, because of the combined attack of sorrow and disease, he soon breathed his last. If instead of delegating all the work to such a subordinate, Emerson had himself looked after the administration, a greater degree of progress and reform may have been made possible during his tenure. The little that he himself looked after was accomplished; it was due to his character that the prison did not turn into a veritable hell and remained merely a place for severe punishment. Even after Emerson was transferred, the effects of his goodness did not wholly disappear; his successors were obliged to preserve at least sixty percent of the humane measures he had put into place.

Jogen *babu*, a Bengali, was the chief administrator of various jail departments; similarly, the Bengali doctor, Baidyanath *babu*, managed the hospital. His superior officer, Doctor Daly, did not possess the magnanimity of Mr. Emerson - yet he was a true gentleman and a learned person. He had nothing but praise for the quiet demeanour, cheerfulness and obedience of the young revolutionaries; he exchanged pleasantries with the younger lot and discussed matters related to religion, politics and philosophy, with the others. The doctor was of Irish descent and he had inherited many qualities of that liberal and emotional race. There was



no meanness about him; in occasional fits of anger, he might utter a harsh word or be strict but under normal circumstances, he loved to help people. He was used to various ruses and false symptoms reported by prisoners, and sometimes, his suspicion would lead him to overlook even genuine cases. But once convinced of the genuineness of a sickness, he would treat the patients with great care and kindness. Once I had a slight fever. It was then the rainy season and the moisture-laden winds had free play in the huge *verandahs* - yet I was unwilling to go to the hospital or take medicine. My views on illness and cure had undergone a change and I no longer put much faith in medicines. It was my belief that good health could be regained naturally, unless it was a particularly severe illness. It was my intention to use yogic powers to contain the ill-effects of contact with the moist air and thus verify and prove to the logical mind the truth of yogic processes and its effectiveness. But the doctor was extremely anxious on my account and he stressed the necessity of going to the hospital. Once I was in the hospital, he took great care of me and made arrangements to make me feel at home. He wanted me to be comfortably lodged in the hospital for much longer to avoid the possible ill-effects of the rainy season on my health, if I were to return to the prison-wards. But I refused to stay and insisted on going back to my cell. He was not equally considerate towards all, especially those who were strong and healthy. He was afraid of keeping such people in the hospital even when they were sick. He had a false notion that if any major incident were to take place in the jail, it would

be caused by these strong and restless lads. What happened eventually though was the exact opposite; the incident in the hospital was caused by the ailing, emaciated Satyendranath Bose and the disease-afflicted, gentle-natured, reticent Kanailal. Although Dr. Daly did possess these qualities, a majority of his good deeds were inspired and set into motion by Baidyanath *babu*. Actually I had never met a man as sympathetic as Baidyanath *babu*, nor do I expect to meet one here-after; it was as if he were born to help others. An attempt to ameliorate suffering of any kind was to his nature, an inevitable and natural objective. Amidst the suffering and misery of prison-life, it seemed as if he were there to sprinkle upon creatures of hell, the carefully collected celestial waters of bliss. The best solution in face of a want, injustice or needless suffering in the prison was to make sure the information found its way to the doctor. If the solution lay within his powers, the doctor would not rest until it was applied. Baidyanath *babu* nourished a deep love for his motherland in his heart, but being a government servant, he was unable to translate this inner feeling into action. His only failing was an excess of sympathy. Although this may be considered a potential fault for a prison administrator, in terms of higher ethics, it represented the ultimate progress as a human-being and was a quality most beloved of God. Baidyanath *babu* did not discriminate between the ordinary prisoners and the ones related to '*Bande mataram*'; the sick or the ailing were treated in the hospital with the same care, irrespective of who they were, and the doctor would be unwilling to release

anyone until they regained good health. This 'fault' was the true reason for the early termination of his service. Subsequent to the murder of Naren Goswami, the authorities suspected this conduct and unfairly terminated the doctor's service.

There is a special need to mention the humane conduct of staff-members of the Prison administration and their kindness. I have been obliged to criticise earlier the arrangements made for us in prison, and I shall continue to expose the inhuman cruelty of the British prison system. But I have also described the qualities of the chief staff-members so that readers do not imagine this cruelty to be a reflection of any staff-member's personal character. Further evidence of the personal qualities of the Prison-staff may be found in the earlier description of prison life.

I have already described my mental state on the first day of solitary confinement. The first few days in solitary confinement were spent without books or any external aids for passing time. Then Mr. Emerson permitted articles of clothing and reading material to be brought from home. I borrowed requisite items like pen, ink and stationery from the Prison-staff and sent a letter to my respected maternal uncle, the well-known editor of *Sanjibani*, requesting him to send my *dhoti-kurta* and the Gita and the Upanishads. It took only a few days for the books to reach me. This period provided adequate opportunity to appreciate the effects of solitary confinement. I gained an insight into the causes leading to the degeneration of even strong and firm intellects in such conditions and the rapid loss of sanity that occurs subsequently. I realized God's

Infinite Compassion in such a state and the rare opening it creates for an union with Him. Before imprisonment, I would meditate for an hour each in the morning and evening. In my prison-cell, as there was nothing else to keep me occupied, I attempted to meditate for longer periods. But it was not easy, especially for one who is unaccustomed, to master the restless human mind, pulled so easily in a hundred different directions, and keep it in a meditative state, under reasonable control and focused for extended periods. I could manage to concentrate for an hour and half or sometimes two hours at a stretch; beyond that the mind would rebel and the body would become numb. Initially the mind was full of thoughts of all kinds. Later on, the objectlessness and insufferable futility of thoughts arising in a void of human interaction, caused the mind to gradually lose its capacity to think. Then I fell into a condition where it seemed that a hundred indistinct ideas were circling the mind but were barred from entering it; the few that did enter, sank without a trace in the utter silence of a thoughtless mind. I experienced intense mental agony in this uncertain, helpless state. I sought mental solace and respite for the distressed brain in the beauty of nature - but the solitary tree, the tiny blue slice of visible sky and the joyless prison-scenes did not alleviate the prevalent condition for long. I looked at the wall. The lifeless blank surface of the wall made the mind feel more hopeless than ever and agonizing over the present state of imprisonment, it throbbed restlessly in the cranium. I tried to meditate but could not; instead the intense but failed attempt worsened

matters as the mind felt yet more exhausted, useless, and miserable. I looked around for distractions - at last the movement of large black ants around a hole caught my eyes and I spent quite some time watching their activities and endeavours. Then I noticed a line of tiny red ants. Soon a fight broke out between the black and the red ants; the black ants began to bite and kill the red ones. I felt a great kindness and sympathy for the red ants at their predicament. I attempted to save them by driving away the black ants. This gave me something to do and something to think about and in this manner, the ants helped me pass my time for the next few days. However I was yet to find the means to fill the long vacant hours. I tried to argue with myself, even forced myself to reflect; but with every passing day the mind grew yet more rebellious, as if crying desperately for succour. Time seemed to weigh heavily upon the mind and it began to crumble beneath this burden, unable even to break free for a moment's respite - it was as if one were being strangled by an enemy in a nightmare but had no power to move one's limbs. I was amazed at this condition! It is true that I was not inclined to remain idle or without activity; still I have spent long hours in solitary musings. How could the mind then suddenly become so weak that the solitude of but a few days was causing such agitation? I thought to myself: perhaps there is a world of difference between voluntary solitude and solitary confinement. It is one thing to enjoy solitude at home, but to be compelled into solitary confinement in a prison was quite another matter. At home one could turn at will to men for company or satiate the mind

with literary knowledge and charm, conversation with friends, varied noises from the street, multifarious scenes of life and thus feel at ease. But here one was bound by strict rules and stood deprived of outside human contact. According to a proverb, one who can bear solitude is either a god or a brute; it is beyond the capability of mere mortals. Although my belief in this proverb was previously limited, I could now see the truth inherent in it; I realized that it was difficult for even yogic aspirants to bear solitude. I recalled the dreadful fate of the Italian regicide, Bresci. The judges instead of passing the death-sentence, gave him seven years of solitary imprisonment. Bresci became insane even before a year had passed. But he did endure for that long! Was my mental strength going to last only this far? I could not understand then that God was but toying with my mind and actually teaching me some necessary lessons, in the guise of this play. First, He gave me an insight into the mental process that impels a prisoner towards insanity in solitary confinement, and exposing the inhuman cruelty inherent in this manner of punishment, turned me into a staunch opponent of the European prison-system. He thus educated me so that I would endeavour, to the best of my ability, to turn my countrymen and the world against such barbarous ways and in favour of a more humane and sympathetic prison system. I recalled the time when on returning home from England fifteen years ago, I had started writing articles in *Induprakash* (a daily paper published from Bombay). These articles contained a strong rebuttal of the prayer-and-petition policies of the Congress. The late Mahadeo Govind

Ranade was aware of the impact of these articles on the youth and had wanted to stop its continuation. In a subsequent meeting, he had spent half-an hour trying to dissuade me from writing these articles and had advised me to take up some other work in the Congress. He had wanted me to take up the responsibility of prison reform. I had been astonished and dissatisfied at this unexpected suggestion and had refused to accept that work. I did not know then that this was a clairvoyant indication to the distant future and that one day God would Himself keep me in a prison for a year to give me direct experience of the inherent cruelty and uselessness of the Prison-system and educate me on the urgent need for Prison reform. Although there was no immediate possibility of prison reforms in the prevalent political dispensation, I resolved before my inner soul to publicise the issue and offer logical arguments to ensure that this hellish legacy of a foreign civilization did not find acceptance in an India possessed of the right to self-determination. His second purpose was also revealed to me: by thus exposing the mind's weakness to itself, He wanted to remove the flaw for ever. An aspirant to the *yogic* state must be equal to the company of men or solitude. In reality, this weakness did disappear completely in a very short time; and I felt as if the mental poise would remain undisturbed even if I were to remain in solitary confinement for ten years at a stretch. The *Mangalamaya* (All-Good) ensured that apparent evil was but a passage to a greater good. His third purpose was to teach me that my yoga would not proceed on the strength of personal effort, but an absolute faith

and complete self-surrender would be the means to attain perfection in yoga; the Supreme Grace would grant whatever power, realisation or joy it deems fit in its Supreme Vision and to assimilate and utilise these for His work should be the sole aim of my yogic endeavours. As the veil of Ignorance lifted, I began to see the *Managalmaya* Lord's amazing and infinite goodness reflected in all World-events. There was nothing that happened in this world, from the apparently most significant to the most trivial, which did not lead to greater good. He often fulfilled multiple objectives through a single act. We often think of the world as the play of a blind force and consider waste as part of nature's method and thus questioning God's omniscience, we find fault with the Supreme Intelligence. This accusation though has no basis. The Divine Power cannot and does not work blindly; not a single drop of His power can ever be wasted; rather the Supreme economy inherent in the manner He achieves a variety of results is beyond human comprehension.

The suffering caused in this manner by mental inactivity continued for a few days. One afternoon as I was reflecting, there was an endless flow of thought-streams; suddenly these thoughts grew so uncontrolled and incoherent that I felt the mind was about to lose its power to regulate them. Afterwards when I returned to the normal state, I realized that though the mental control had ceased, the intelligence itself did not cease or get corrupted; it was as if quietly observing this wondrous process. But overcome by the fear of losing my sanity at the time, I had failed to notice this. I called upon God with intensity, praying fervently for Him to preserve my sanity. That very moment, a great peace descended upon my mind and heart, a cooling sensation spread over my entire body and the restless mind became relaxed and happy - I had never experienced such a joyful state in this life. Just as a child lies on the lap of his mother, secure and fearless; so I lay on the lap of the World-Mother. From that very day, all my suffering in prison ceased. After this I experienced various conditions: restlessness in detention, mental unease caused by lack of activity and solitary confinement, physical suffering or illness and stages of despair in the process of yoga; but the power that God had poured into my inner being in that one moment was such that the arrival and departure of sorrow did not leave the slightest trace in the mind. The intelligence was able to draw strength and joy from the sorrow itself and annul the suffering of the mind. The hardships became as if drops of water on a lily. By the time I received the books, my need for them had

lessened considerably. I could have managed even without them. This essay was not meant to be a historical record of my inner life during imprisonment - yet I could not help but mention this event. This incident should be adequate explanation for my blissful state during the long period of solitary confinement that followed. It was to bring about this state that God had created the requisite conditions. He did not actually make me lose my sanity but enacted, in my mind, the gradual process leading up to insanity, during solitary confinement, keeping my intelligence as an unmoved witness of the entire drama. This experience increased my strength, created empathy for all victims of human cruelty and made me realise the extraordinary power and efficacy of sincere prayers.

During the period of my solitary confinement, Dr. Daly and the Assistant Superintendent would visit me in my cell almost daily for a chat. I had been a recipient of their special favour and sympathy from the very beginning although I am not aware of the reasons for this. I hardly spoke except to answer their questions during such visits. And during discussions, I either listened quietly or contributed not more than a few words. Yet they continued their visits. One day Daly Sahib spoke to me, *"I have been able to obtain, through the Assistant Superintendent, permission from the senior Saheb for you to take a walk in front of the decree everyday, once each in the morning and evening. I do not like that you should be confined in a small cell throughout the day; it is harmful for both body and mind."* From that day, I was able take a stroll

everyday in the morning and evening in the open space before the decree. In the evenings the duration would vary from ten to fifteen to twenty minutes; in the morning I walked for about an hour. Sometimes I would stay out for as long as two hours; there was no restriction on the time. I found this time quite pleasant. The boundaries of my independent kingdom were marked by the jail factory on one side and the cowshed on the other. As I walked back and forth between the factory and the cowshed, I would recite the solemn, deeply-moving, immortal, potent mantras from the Upanishads or else I would observe the movements and activities of the prisoners, trying to realise within me the primary truth that All was *Narayana* (God). I sought to realize that *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* (All this is the Brahman), repeating the mantra silently and trying to envision Brahman in the trees, houses, walls, men, animals, birds, metals and the earth. As I continued in this manner, I would attain a state where the prison no longer appeared to be a prison: common place objects like the high enclosure, the iron bars, the blank surface of the wall, the tree with its green leaves shining in the sunlight no longer appeared unconscious, but seemed to vibrate with a universal consciousness and come alive. It felt as if they loved me and wished to embrace me. It seemed as if living creatures and their actions were all part of Nature's elaborate play, whilst a vast, pure, detached spirit, rapt in a serene delight, looked out from within. Once in a while it seemed as if the Lord Himself were standing under the tree, playing upon his Flute of Delight and drawing out my very soul with His

sweetness. I began to feel as someone were embracing me, as if someone were holding me on his lap. The development of these emotions overwhelmed my body and mind and a pure and wide peace reigned everywhere; it was an indescribable state. The hard cover of my life opened up and there was a free outflow of love for all creatures from within. In addition to this feeling of love, *Sattwic* emotions such as charity, kindness, *Ahimsa* etcetera developed rapidly and overpowered my dominantly *Rajasic* nature. As these qualities developed further, the delight became greater and the peace too deepened. The anxiety over the case had dissipated at the very start; now a positive feeling grew within me: God is *Managalamaya*, He has brought me into the prison for my own good; my acquittal and the quashing of charges are foregone conclusions - I grew firm in this faith. Hereafter all suffering in the jail ceased for me.

NOTE: Sri Aurobindo spoke publicly of his spiritual experiences in Jail in the "Uttarpara Speech":

"... I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and ..."

It took some more time for these experiences to deepen and become settled; in the meantime the case came up for hearing in the magistrate's court. At first the mind was greatly perturbed at being thrust into the commotion of the external world, in stark contrast with the silence of solitary imprisonment. This interrupted the flow of *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline); and the mind simply refused to bear the dull and uninteresting proceedings of the court for five hours at a stretch. At first I had tried to continue the sadhana in the courtroom, but the unaccustomed mind would be distracted by any and every sound and sight, and the attempt did not succeed. Later on the situation changed and I acquired the power to reject the immediate sounds and sights from the mind, and draw the mind inwards. But this capacity of *dhyana-dharana* was absent in the first phase of court-proceedings. Hence, giving up the futile attempt, I would be content with periodic visions of God in all creatures and spent the rest of the time in observing the activities of my companions in adversity, listening to their conversations and reflecting on other things - sometimes I paid attention to Mr. Norton's valuable remarks and the evidence of witnesses. I found that while the passage of time in solitary imprisonment was a simple and pleasant affair, it was not that easy to spend time in the midst of a crowd and a serious court-case which dealt with matters of life-and-death. The pleasantries and fun-filled laughter of the youthful revolutionaries gave much enjoyment but the court proceedings were devoid of any interest. At four-thirty I would happily get into the police van and return to

the prison.

After fifteen or sixteen days of prison life, the contact with the outside world and mutual company made the other accused extremely happy. Once within the carriage, a fountain of laughter and conversation would be released and it would continue unabated for the entire period of ten odd minutes spent in the carriage. On the first day, they took us to the court with great fan-fare. We were escorted by a small platoon of European sergeants with loaded pistols. While boarding the carriage, a band of armed policemen stood guard around us - they also did marching exercises behind the carriage; the ritual was repeated when we alighted from the carriage. The fan-fare would have led uninformed spectators to imagine that these fun-loving young lads were part of some band of notorious warriors and their bodies and hearts were suffused with such courage and strength, that they could penetrate with their bare hands, the impregnable human-wall formed by hundreds of policemen and 'tommies' and effect their escape - and hence they were being accorded such respect by way of security arrangements. This pomp was kept up for few days but then there was a gradual decline and eventually our escort-party would consist of not more than two to four sergeants on our journey to and from the court. They were not very particular about the way we re-entered the prison; so we would just walk in as if returning home from a stroll. The Police Commissioner and some of the Superintendents became greatly upset at this slackness and negligence and remarked: "*On the first day, we made arrangements for twenty-five to*

thirty sergeants; it is now observed that not more than four or five turn up." They would thus rebuke the sergeants and make strict arrangements for the desired level of security. The number of sergeants would increase marginally as a result of the reprimand but this would not last for long and the laxity would soon recur! The sergeants had found the devotees of the bomb to be quite harmless and peaceful and without any discernible intention or plan to effect an escape or kill or attack anyone; hence they were reluctant to waste their valuable time in unnecessary activities. Initially there used to be a body-search before entering and leaving the court - other than the dubious joy of feeling the soft touch of the sergeants, this was a fruitless activity. It became evident that the Police was deeply sceptical of the usefulness of such a procedure since this too was discontinued after a few days. We could take books, bread, sugar and whatever else we desired to the courtroom without any impediments. At first we did this covertly but later on we openly carried in such items. Soon, they became convinced that none of us would hurl a bomb or fire a pistol in the courtroom. However there was one concern that the Sergeants could not overlook: the calamitous possibility of footwear being hurled at the glorious pate of the magistrate by some impulse-driven prisoner! For this reason, footwear was strictly forbidden in the court and the sergeants never let their guard down in this regard. I did not detect keenness in them for any safety measure other than this.

The case and its make-up was rather odd. The

Magistrate, the counsel, the witnesses, the evidence, the exhibits, the accused - every aspect of the case had an oddness about it. As one observed, day after day, the endless stream of witnesses and exhibits, the counsel's play-acting, the childish magistrate's childlike fickleness and levity, the uniqueness of the accused and their demeanour, one felt, on more than one occasion, as if we were not in a British court of justice but in a theatre or in some fanciful fictional kingdom. A brief description of the odd inhabitants of this kingdom follows.

The government counsel, Mr. Norton was the leading actor of this drama. He also happened to be its author, stage manager and a prompter for court-witnesses - a versatile genius such as his was rare indeed in this world. As Mr. Norton had come from Madras, he was perhaps unaware of and unaccustomed to the code of conduct and ethics prevalent amongst the circle of barristers in Bengal. He had been a leader of the National Organisation, which could explain his incapability for tolerating dissent or reasonable argument and his habitual intimidation of dissenters. A nature such as this is what men describe as a leonine temperament. Although we are unaware if Mr. Norton behaved as a lion at the Madras Corporation, he most certainly behaved as one at Alipore court. It was difficult though to be impressed with the depth of his legal knowledge - which was was like snow in summer. But one could not help but admire Mr Norton's ceaseless flow of commentary, his verbal dexterity, his amazing capability to make inconsequential evidence appear



important, the audacity of his baseless deductions, his bullying of witnesses and junior barristers and his hypnotic powers of persuasion to turn white into black. The best of counsels can be divided into three categories - the first category is able to inspire confidence and belief in the judge's mind by dint of their legal expertise, logical exposition of facts and detailed analysis; the second category can establish the truth through skilful cross-questioning of witnesses and achieve resonance with the judge or the jury by dexterous presentation of the facts of the case and circumstances surrounding it; the third category is comprised of those who can dumbfound the witness through a play of words, intimidation and ceaseless commentary, who can splendidly confuse the entire issue, who can rave and rant to misguide the thought-process of the judge or the jury and win the case. Mr. Norton was amongst the foremost practitioners in the third category. This should not be considered to be a fault though. After all the counsel is a paid professional; he is duty-bound to ensure the accomplishment of the desired objectives of the client in exchange for the fees paid to him. Nowadays, the real objective of the complainant or defendant was not to use the British legal system to bring out the truth of the matter but to win the case by any means. The counsel's endeavour therefore had to be directed towards winning the case, else he would be remiss in his duties towards his client. And if God had not endowed one with suitable qualities, then one must win the case on the strength of whatever qualities one did possess; hence Mr. Norton was but performing his

duty. Mr. Norton received a daily fees of thousand rupees from the Government. If this expenditure were to be in vain, then that would be a loss for the Government; hence Mr. Norton was doing his utmost to avoid such a situation. However for political cases such as this, the British Legal system as a rule allowed for special leniency to the accused in the matter of basic conveniences as well as discouraged undue emphasis on suspect or unverified evidence. I do not believe that Mr. Norton would have harmed his case, had he cared to remember and follow this rule. In fact, some innocent persons would have been spared the torture of solitary imprisonment and the harmless Ashok Nandi may not have lost his life. The counsel's leonine nature was probably to blame for this fault. In the same manner as Holinshed, Hall and Plutarch had compiled the material for Shakespeare's historical plays, the police had prepared the material for this drama-like case. The Shakespeare of our play was none other than Mr. Norton. However, there was a capital difference between Shakespeare and Mr. Norton in that Shakespeare on occasions left portions of the compiled material unutilized, whereas Mr. Norton was loathe to do that. He seized upon all available material, regardless of it being true or false, good or bad, cogent or irrelevant, important or inconsequential, embellished it with his fertile imagination, added suggestions, inferences and hypotheses and constructed a plot so wondrous that even Shakespeare and Defoe and others among the greatest poets and novelists were outdone by our high priest of literature. Although critics may point out that

in the same manner as Falstaff's hotel bill reflected a penny's worth of bread and countless gallons of wine, Mr. Norton's plot too appeared to contain an ounce of admissible evidence accompanied by a surfeit of inferences, guess-work and suggestions, they could not but extol the dexterity and skill inherent in the plot's construction. I was most gratified that Mr. Norton had chosen me as the protagonist of his play. Just like Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, I happened to be at the centre of the mighty revolution as imagined in Norton's plot: extraordinarily intelligent, with untold capabilities and immense powers, a bold, bad man! It was as if the National Movement began and ended with me; as if I was at once its sole creator and saviour, endeavouring to bring down the British empire. As soon as any high-quality, inspirational piece of writing in English came into view, Mr. Norton would jump up from his seat and loudly proclaim - Aurobindo Ghose! Everything that happened as part of the revolution - whether legal or illegal, whether deliberately organised or an unexpected consequence - had to originate from Aurobindo Ghose! And Aurobindo Ghose being the origin, then even if apparently legal, these must surely be a cover for hidden intentions that were potentially illegal. He seemed to be convinced that if I were not apprehended, the British raj in India would be dismantled within two years. The discovery of my name, even on a scrap of paper, would be enough to thrill Mr. Norton, who would then respectfully lay this invaluable evidence at the feet of the presiding magistrate. It is a pity for him that I was not born as

an Avatar, else his devotion to me and ceaseless meditation upon me would have earned him *mukti*(salvation), and reduced both the period of our detention and the government's expenses. Since I was declared innocent and acquitted of all charges in the Sessions court, Mr Norton's plot lost both its essential validity and glamour. Mr. Beachcroft's judgement, akin to leaving out Hamlet from Hamlet, the play, destroyed the glory of the greatest epic of the twentieth century and made him a complete kill-joy in Norton's eyes. If critics were also given editing rights to creative works, than such a tragedy is but expected. Norton also held a similar grouse against the few witnesses, who too had acted as kill-joys and completely refused to bear evidence in accordance with his fabricated plot. When faced with such hostile witnesses, Norton would become furious, roar like a veritable lion to strike fear into their hearts and threaten them. Mr. Norton's anger under such circumstances was similar to the legitimate outburst of a poet aggrieved at an inaccurate representation of his poem or that of a stage manager when the actor's declamation, tone or postures are not in keeping with his specific directions. It was this *sattwic* anger that was the cause of his quarrel with barrister Bhuvan Chatterji. Now, there could be no greater kill-joy than Mr. Chatterji: he had scant regard for propriety and his timing was all awry. Whenever Mr. Norton overlooked the distinction between the relevant and the irrelevant and presented evidence purely for the sake of poetic effect, Mr. Chatterji would invariably raise objections about their admissibility. He was unable to grasp that the inclusion



Sessions Judge Charles Porten Beachcroft

of such evidence was not based on its relevancy or legitimacy but purely on its potential usefulness to Mr Norton's drama. Such impropriety irked not just Mr. Norton but even Mr. Birley. On one such occasion, Mr. Birley spoke out in a pitiable manner: "*Mr. Chatterji, we were getting on very nicely before you came.*" That was indeed so; such frequent objections, regardless of their validity, not only prevented the unfolding of the drama but also created unwelcome interruptions in the audience's entertainment.

If Mr. Norton happened to be the author of this drama, its lead-actor and stage manager, Mr. Birley may well be described as its patron. He appeared to be a credit to the Scottish race. His figure reminded one of Scotland - inordinately white, inordinately tall, inordinately lean; the smallish head at the end of a longish body gave the impression of Ochterlony himself perched atop the Ochterlony monument, or a ripe coconut affixed to the pointed tip of Cleopatra's obelisk! He was sandy-haired and all the snow and ice of Scotland seemed to lie frozen in his facial expression. An ample body should be accompanied with a matching intelligence else nature's sense of economy might be held in doubt. But Mother Nature seems to have been distracted and rather unmindful in the matter of Birley. The English poet Marlowe had described this economy as "infinite riches in a little room" but an encounter with Mr. Birley led to the contrary impression - little riches in an infinite room. In reality, one felt saddened by the precious little intelligence that was housed in a body as ample as this. The fact that a small number of such

administrators were governing the fate of thirty crores of Indians, aroused a profound appreciation for the greatness of the English and their system of governance. Mr. Birley's knowledge of law was exposed during the cross-examination conducted by Shrijut Byomkesh Chakravarty. When Birley was asked for the date when he had taken charge of the case and the legal procedure for completing the process, his head reeled, even though he had served as a Magistrate for so many years. When he was unable to provide any answers, he tried to redeem himself by shifting the responsibility to Mr. Chakravarty. The question thus raised about the timing of Mr. Birley's taking over the case still stands as one of the unresolved complexities of this case. The pitiable appeal that he had made to Mr. Chatterji, as mentioned earlier, gives us some insight into Mr. Birley's method of administering justice in his court. From the very outset, Birley had been charmed by Mr. Norton's learning and rhetoric and fallen under his spell. He would humbly follow the path as led by Norton, derive his views from Norton's views, join enthusiastically in Norton's laughter, grow angry in Norton's anger; one would feel overwhelmed with affection and tenderness at his simple child-like conduct. Birley was indeed childish. I had never been able to accept him in the role of a magistrate; the impression one received of him was of a student, abruptly elevated to the role of teacher and made to occupy the teacher's high seat. And that was indeed how he conducted the affairs of the court. If anyone were to behave contrary to his expectations, Birley

would discipline him like a schoolmaster. If some of us started chatting amongst ourselves to dispel the boredom brought upon by the farcical proceedings, Mr. Birley would chide us as in the manner of a schoolmaster; if we did not obey him, he would order us to 'stand up' as punishment; if his order was not complied with immediately, he would ask the sentry to enforce it. We had grown so accustomed to this "schoolmaster-like" manner, that when Birley and Chatterji began to argue, we expected the "stand up" punishment to be delivered upon the barrister imminently. However Mr. Birley adopted a different course of action and shouting out: "*Sit down, Mr. Chatterji*", he forced this newly-arrived, disobedient pupil at his Alipore School to take a seat. Some teachers get annoyed with their students and threaten them on being asked too many questions or being asked to elaborate; similarly Mr. Birley too would lose his cool and threaten defence counsels, if they dared to raise objections. Norton too on his part, found some witnesses bothersome. Norton would want to establish that a certain piece of writing was the handwriting of a certain accused person; if the witness were to respond with: "*No sir, this specimen is not exactly like that handwriting, but it could be, one cannot be sure,*" - and many witnesses did respond like that - Norton would lose his patience. He would employ any means - shout, scold, intimidate or threaten - to elicit the desired answer. His last question would invariably be, "*What is your belief? Yes or no?*" The witness could neither say "yes" nor could he say "no". He would eventually repeat his earlier answer and try to explain to Norton

that he held no "*belief*" in the matter and was currently oscillating between the two options in a state of grave doubt. But Norton would not accept such an answer. He would thunder out his favourite question: "*Come, sir. What is your belief?*" Mr. Birley following Mr. Norton's cue would thunder in turn: "*Tomar biswas ki achay?*" (What is your belief in the matter?) The poor witness would now face a horrendous dilemma. He had no "*biswas*" (belief), yet on one side he had to contend with the magistrate, and on the other side, with Norton, who, like a veritable tiger, was eager to tear out his very bones and intestines in an effort to extract the priceless elusive "*biswas*". The "*biswas*" would still not materialise, and the witness - his body soaked in sweat and his brain in a whirl - would escape from this place of torture with his life. Some who held their life dearer than their "*biswas*" would make good their escape by offering a made-up "*biswas*" at the feet of Mr. Norton, who thus propitiated, would complete his cross-examination in a suitably affectionate manner. This unique combination of counsel and magistrate and their actions made the case appear even more as a play.

It was only a small number of witnesses whose conduct was not in accordance with Mr. Norton's demands; the large majority provided desirable answers to his questions. There were very few familiar faces amongst this majority. Some of them though were well-known to us. We shall remain eternally grateful to Devdas Karan Mahashaya who had caused great mirth and laughter and helped to dispel our boredom. This truthful witness had given evidence that

at the time of the Midnapore Conference, when Surendra *babu* had asked for *gurubhakti* (devotion to the teacher) from his students, Aurobindo *babu* had spoken out: "*What did Drona do?*" On hearing this, Mr. Norton's eagerness and curiosity knew no bounds; he must have imagined this "Drona" to be a devotee of the bomb or a political assassin or someone associated with the Manicktola Garden or the "*Chhatra Bhandar*". Norton may have interpreted the sentence to indicate that Aurobindo Ghose was advising that Surendra *babu* be rewarded with bombs instead of *gurubhakti*; such an interpretation would have undoubtedly made it easier to establish the case. Hence he repeated the question eagerly: "*What did Drona do?*" At first the witness was simply unable to comprehend the intent of the question. This continued for about five minutes; finally Mr. Karan threw up his hands, pointed to the sky and told Norton: "*Drona had performed many many amazing things.*" Obviously, this was not enough to satisfy Mr. Norton. How could he be satisfied unless '*Drona's bomb*' was discovered? So he asked again: "*What do you mean by 'many amazing acts'? Tell us the specific things he did.*" The witness provided various answers, but none could reveal this secret mystery of Dronacharya's life. Mr. Norton now lost his temper and started to thunder. The witness too began to shout. An advocate quipped: "*Perhaps the witness does not know what Drona had done*". At this Karan Mahashaya, nursing his wounded pride, flared up. He screamed: "*What? I do not know what Drona had done? Bah, have I read the Mahabharata from cover to cover in vain?*" For the next half an hour, a verbal battle raged

between Norton and Karan over Drona. Every now and then, Norton's thunderous question would shake the very foundations of Alipore judge's court: "*Out with it, Mr. Editor! What did Drona do?*" Mr. Editor now launched into a long-winded story, but alas it provided no clues as to what Drona had done. Peals of laughter reverberated through the courtroom. Eventually, Karan *Mahashaya* returned from the tiffin-break, becalmed and suitably prepared; he clarified the issue by stating that Drona had actually done nothing and that the earlier heated debate over the past acts of the departed soul had been in vain. In reality, it was Arjuna who had killed his guru, Drona. Notwithstanding this false accusation against Arjuna, Dronacharya must have felt greatly relieved and offered his gratitude to *Sadashiva* at *Kailasha* for ensuring that he would not be summoned as a witness in the Alipore bomb case on account of Karan *Mahashaya*'s evidence. After all, a single word from the editor would have been sufficient to establish his relationship with Aurobindo Ghose. But *Ashutosh Sadashiva* (Lord Shiva) had saved him from such a fate.

The witnesses in the case could be divided into three categories: those from the police and the secret service, those from the lower classes and *bhadralok* (middle classes) who were helpless in their love for the Police and those who were incapable of such affection for the police but compelled to give evidence nevertheless. Each category of witnesses had a unique style of giving evidence. The gentlemen of the police would cheerfully and unhesitatingly speak in

accordance with their scripted part, identifying those who were supposed to be identified, without the slightest hint of doubt, hesitation or possibility of error. Those friendly with the Police would give evidence with considerable eagerness, identifying those who were supposed to be identified; sometimes, getting carried away, even identifying those who were not supposed to be identified. The witnesses who were brought under coercion, spoke whatever they knew but that amounted to very little; Norton would be dissatisfied with this and assuming that the witness was withholding valuable and certain proof, he would resort to intimidatory cross-examination to elicit the desired evidence. This created a terrible crisis for such witnesses as they were caught between Mr. Norton's intimidatory roar and Mr. Birley's blood-shot eyes on one side and the prospect of committing the great sin of sending their countrymen to the Andaman islands by bearing false evidence, on the other. The witnesses would now be faced with a critical choice: whether to satisfy Norton and Birley or to satisfy God. On one hand, there was transient danger from human wrath and on the other was the prospect of hell and misery in the next life as punishment for one's sinful act. The witnesses reasoned that the prospect of hell and the next life were matters of the far-off future while the danger of human origin was immediate and might materialize the very next moment. The fear of being convicted for bearing false evidence, because of unwillingness to do so, must have also played on their minds, since examples of such a consequence in this very place were none too rare. Therefore, for this

category of witnesses, the time spent in the witness-box was a veritable torture and coloured with fears of untold hues. When the cross-examination finally ended, their half-dead bodies were as if resuscitated and they were able to breathe freely again. Some witnesses, however remained unimpressed and unaffected by Norton's intimidation and boldly gave their evidence without so much as raising their eyebrows; in such cases the English counsel, following his national character, would beat a retreat and soften his approach. In this manner, various witnesses provided a diversity of evidence, but none helped the police case in any mention-worthy manner. One witness spoke quite plainly, "*I know nothing and I do not understand why the police have dragged me into this!*" Such a method for conducting court-cases is perhaps possible only in India; in any other country, the judge would have been suitably annoyed and severely censured the Police and taught them a lesson. The wastage of the tax-payer's money by presenting hundreds of witnesses on the basis of guesswork, without a proper investigation and evaluation of possible guilt and the senseless detention of the accused in the torturous conditions of prison life over long periods, were acts befitting only this country's police force. But what else could the helpless police-force do? They were detectives only in name and in absence of such capabilities, their only option was to cast a wide net for witnesses - good, bad or indifferent - and present them in the witness box. After all one never knew; they might possess some information and may even provide some evidence.

The method employed for identification of the accused was also extremely odd. The witness was first asked, "*Would you be able to recognise any of these persons?*" If the witness answered in the affirmative, Mr. Norton would be overjoyed. He would immediately arrange for an identification parade and order the witness to demonstrate his powers of recollection. If the witness said: "*I am not sure but I may be able to recognise*", Mr. Norton would be annoyed and say: "*All right then, give it a try*". However if the witness responded in the negative, "*No, I cannot recognize anyone; I have not seen them earlier or I did not notice anyone particularly*", Mr. Norton would still not relent. The witness would be sent for the identification parade as an experiment to check if the faces were able to trigger some buried memory of the past life. The witness would be lacking in such yogic powers and perhaps even lacking in belief in re-incarnation; nevertheless, he would march gravely, under the sergeant's supervision, between two long rows of accused persons, and without even looking at us, shake his head and announce: "*No, I don't know anyone of them*". Norton would be crestfallen and withdraw his human net without a catch. This trial proved to be a unique illustration of the precision and faultlessness of human memory. A group of thirty to forty people would be in view; one would not know their names, one would have had no acquaintance with them in any life - past or present, yet one would be able to recollect having seen or not seen a particular face two months ago, or having seen a particular person at three specific locations but not in two other

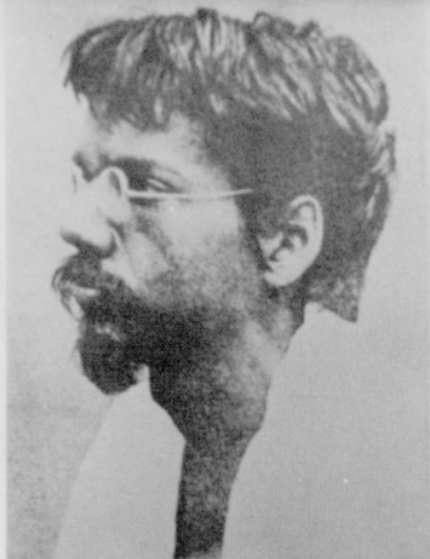
locations. In one case, a mere glimpse of a person brushing his teeth would be adequate for his face to be etched in memory for eternity; in another case, one would have no recollection of the time of meeting a particular person or of his actions at the time or the identity of his companions or whether he had been alone and yet his face too would be etched in memory for eternity. As one had met Hari on ten occasions, there was no possibility of forgetting him; but one had met Shyam for merely half a minute and yet one could not forget him until one's dying day, without any possibility of lapse in memory - such powers of recollection in this imperfect human form, in a mortal world of ignorance and error, is a great rarity indeed. Yet such amazing, faultless, precise powers of recollection were exhibited by not just one or two police-men but the entire police force. As a consequence, our devotion and respect for the C.I.D. deepened with every passing day. It is unfortunate though that the respect could not be sustained when the case reached the Sessions Court. This is not to say however that there had been no occasion for doubt in the magistrate's court. When one saw that it was clearly established via written evidence that Sisir Ghose had been in Bombay in the month of April and yet some police-men claimed to have seen him in Scott's Lane and Harrison Road during that very period, one could not help but feel suspicious. When Birendrachandra Sen of Sylhet was physically present at his father's place at Baniachung and yet his subtle body became visible to the occult vision of the C.I.D. at the Muraripukur Garden and Scott's Lane at the very

same time - even though it was proven conclusively through written evidence that Birendra was not aware of the address of the property at Scott's Lane - the suspicion was strengthened. When the Police claimed to have seen some persons, who had never set foot in Scott's Lane, in that very location on more than one occasion, the preponderance of suspicion was but natural. A witness from Midnapore - whom the accused from Midnapore identified as a police detective - claimed to have seen Hemchandra Sen of Sylhet delivering a speech at Tamluk. Now Hemchandra had never visited Tamluk physically; perhaps his causal body had rushed there from far-off Sylhet to deliver a powerful and seditious nationalist speech and thus provided visual and aural stimuli to the detective *Mahashaya*. An even greater mystery was the presence of the causal body of Charuchandra Roy of Chandernagore at Manicktola. Two police officers declared on oath that on such and such date and time they had seen Charu *babu* at Shyambazar, from where he had walked down to the Manicktola Gardens, in the company of an important conspirator. The police officers claimed to have followed them all the way and observed them at close quarters, thus ruling out any possibility of mistaken identity. Both witnesses maintained their stand during cross-examination. *Vyasasya vacanam satyam* (Vyasa always speaks the truth); the evidence given by the police has to be considered similarly. There was no possibility of a mistake in the date or time either, since it was established from the evidence of the Principal, Dupleix College, Chandernagore, that Charu *babu* had indeed

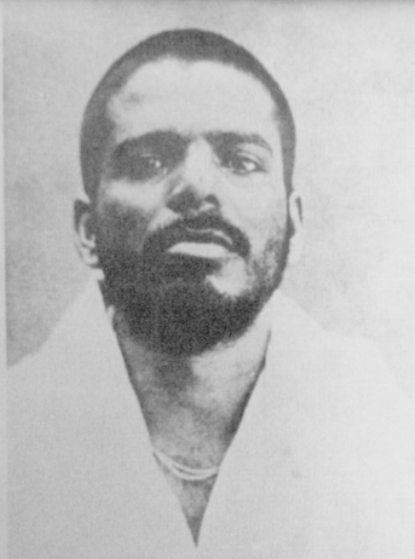
taken leave from the College and gone to Calcutta on the said day and during the said time. But amazingly, on that very day and at that very hour, Charu *babu* had actually been chatting with Mayor Tardival of Chandernagore, Tardival's wife, the Governor of Chandernagore and few other distinguished European gentlemen as they strolled about the platform of Howrah station. All of them had readily agreed to stand witness in favour of Charu *babu*. Since the police had to release Charu *babu* at the instance of the French government, this secret was never revealed in the court. But it is my suggestion to Charu *babu* that he should send all this evidence to the Psychological Research Society and thereby assist in the advancement of human knowledge. As Police evidence - especially the C.I.D.'s evidence - can never be false, hence one has no option but to seek refuge in Theosophy for an explanation. The ease with which the British legal system makes it possible for innocent persons to be imprisoned, sent to *kalapani* (transportation) or even served with the death sentence was demonstrated at every step of the case. Unless one stands in the witness box as an accused, it is not possible to realize the illusory promise and falsehood inherent in the Western Legal system. This European legal system then appears to be nothing but a special form of gambling where at stake are a man's freedom and happiness and where at stake for a man and his family, his friends and relatives are matters of life-long agony, humiliation and a life that is worse than death. There is no count of the guilty who are let-off and the innocent who perish in this gamble. It is

only when one has a personal stake in this gamble and is caught up in the heartless, unjust, threshing-machinery meant for protecting society, that one begins to comprehend the reasons for the propagation and impact of Socialism and Anarchism in Europe. Under such circumstance, it is not surprising that many liberal, kind-hearted men have started calling for society and its structure to be dismantled and completely destroyed; if this much sin and injustice and these many innocent person's incensed breaths and bleeding hearts is the cost of protecting society, then the protection of such a society is not necessary.

The only mention-worthy event in the magistrate's court was the evidence given by Narendranath Goswami. Before we move on to that, let us turn our attention to the young co-accused, who were my companions in adversity. Their conduct in court convinced me that a new age had dawned in Bengal and a new generation had arrived on the Mother's lap. The youth in Bengal of that period were of two primary types: either quiet, well-mannered, harmless, of good character but timid, lacking in self-respect and lofty ambitions; or ill-behaved, boisterous, restless, violent, lacking in self-restraint and truthfulness. The beings who had taken birth on the lap of Mother Bengal lay somewhere in between these two extremes, but barring some eight or ten extraordinary, talented, powerful, visionary, leaders of the future, one would hardly find any worthy descendants of the Aryan race amongst them. Though the people in Bengal had intelligence and talent, they



Barindra K. Ghose



Upendra Nath Bannerjee

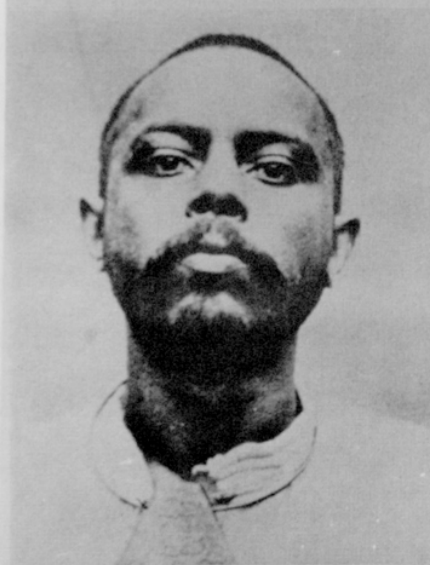


Plate 2 Ullaskar Datta



The leaders Hem Chandra Das

Barindra K. Ghose
Ullaskar Dutt

Upendranath Bannerjee
Hem Chandra Das

The leaders of the revolutionaries



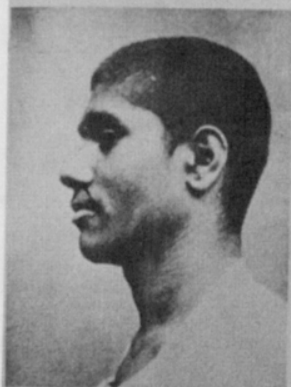
Indu Bhusan Roy



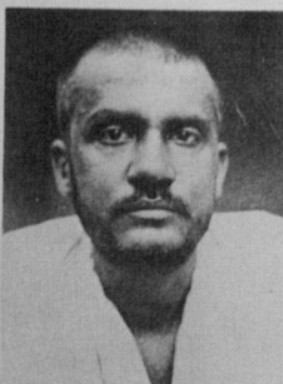
Birendra Nath Ghosh



Bibhuti Bhusan Sarkar



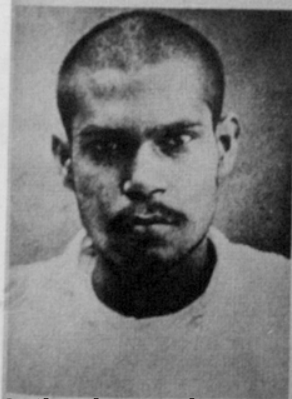
Sudhir Kumar Sarkar



Hrishikesh Kanjilal



Bijoy Kumar Nag

Sailendra Nath Bose
Plate 3

Krishna Jiban Sanyal



Abinash Bhattacharya

A "rogues' gallery" of revolutionaries

Indubhusan Roy
Sudhir Kumar Sarkar
Sailendra Nath Bose

Birendra Nath Ghosh
Hrishikesh Kanjilal
Krishna Jiban Sanyal

Bibhuti Bhusan Sarkar
Bijoy Kumar Nag
Abinash Bhattacharya

were lacking in power of action and humanity. But these young boys made one feel as if a different breed of large-hearted, puissant, dynamic men of a bygone era had re-emerged in India. That fearless, innocent look in their eyes, the dynamism inherent in their words, their delight and joy devoid of sentimentality, their unaffected brightness in the midst of this crisis, their cheerfulness and pleasantness, untouched by irritation, concern or grief, was completely uncharacteristic of the inertia-bound Indians of the time and seemed to herald a new age, a new race and a new stream of activities. If these were indeed murderers as claimed, then it is strange that their natures seemed remarkably unblemished by the dark shadow of murderous deeds and their conduct did not betray the slightest hint of cruelty or recklessness or brutishness. They passed their prison-time in boyish fun, laughter, games, reading and discussions amongst themselves without sparing the least thought for their own future or the outcome of the trial. In a very short span of time, they became friendly with the Prison-staff, the sentries, the convicts, the European sergeants, the detectives, the court officials and engaged in playful banter with all without any distinction between friend or foe and high or low. They found the courtroom proceedings quite tiresome as there was nothing of interest in that farcical trial. But there were no aids for passing the time as books were not at hand and conversation was forbidden. Those who had started doing yoga but were not advanced enough in their practice to be able to meditate in this commotion, found it especially difficult to pass time. In

the beginning, a few amongst the lot started bringing books with them. This practice was soon emulated by others. After some time this resulted in a strange spectacle: the trial would be in progress, the fate of about thirty to forty accused convicts hung in the balance, the outcome could either be death by hanging or transportation for life; yet those who could be affected, without so much as a glance at the proceedings, would remain absorbed in perusal of Bankimchandra's novels or Vivekananda's Raja Yoga or Science of Religions, or the Gita, the Puranas, or books on European Philosophy. Neither the English sergeants nor the Indian policemen created any hindrance in this conduct. They probably thought to themselves that if this served to keep the caged-tigers quiet, then their own jobs would become that much easier. Moreover they did not foresee any potential harm to anyone. However one day Mr Birley's attention was drawn to this sight; such a practice was intolerable to him. He kept quiet for the first two days but then he could not exercise restraint and issued orders banning the access to books. It was indeed regrettable that people were reading books rather than paying attention to and appreciating Mr. Birley's remarkable dispensation of justice! There is no doubt that the entire practice was downright disrespectful to Birley's personal glory as well as the greatness of British justice system.

When we were detained in separate cells, the only opportunity for conversation was to be had in the police van or while waiting for the magistrate's arrival or during tiffin time. Those who were already friendly or acquainted would spend this time in laughter,

banter, pleasantries and various kinds of discussion, as if to make up for time lost in the forced silence and solitude of the cell. As it was difficult get acquainted or strike up friendships with complete strangers under such circumstances, my interaction was largely limited to Barindra or Abinash. Hence I would generally remain a passive participant in the conversation and laughter around me. However there was one person who would sometimes try to strike up a conversation with me - this was none other Narendranath Goswami, who would later turn into an 'approver'. His was not the quiet and well-behaved nature evident in other boys. He was rather bold, light-minded and unrestrained in character, speech and act. At the time of his arrest his natural courage and boldness came to the fore but later on he found himself incapable of bearing even the slightest suffering and inconvenience of prison life. After all, he was a landlord's son, with a spoilt upbringing amidst luxury, pomp and moral indulgence. The severe austerity and constraints of prison life had driven him to despair and he expressed his feelings freely and openly to all. He was gradually possessed by an intense desire to escape this torture through any means. At first he had hoped to retract his confession and prove that the Police had used physical torture to force his confession of guilt. He had shared with us that his father was determinedly arranging for false witnesses to help in proving this. A few days later, a new aspect was revealed to us. His father and a *moktar* (a pleader's agent) began to visit him frequently in the prison. Eventually detective Shamsul Alam also started holding long conversations with him

in secret. During this period, Gossain's curiosity and his tendency to ask questions led to a preponderance of suspicion in the minds of many amongst us. He would ask many kinds of questions of Barindra and Upendra, regarding their acquaintance with or closeness to important Indian personalities, the identity of those who nourished the secret society with financial assistance, the identity of other members outside India or in other provinces of India, the next rung of leadership who would run the society, the location of other branches of the society etcetera. This matter of Gossain's sudden thirst for information soon became known to all; the matter of his growing intimacy with Shamsul Alam too did not retain the nature of a confidential conversation between lovers but became an open secret. All of this was analyzed in detail and it was noticed by some that after every such *darshan* (visit) by the police, Gossain seemed to find a new set of questions to ask. It is needless to mention that Gossain did not receive satisfactory answers to any of his questions. When this matter first came to light, Gossain had confessed that the police were trying to persuade him to turn "King's Evidence" through various means. He once mentioned this matter to me in the court. I asked him: "*What has been your response?*" He said: "*Am I going to be taken in by that! And even if I do agree, what do I know that I can provide evidence as they want?*" After a few days, when he broached the subject once again, I noticed the matter had advanced quite a bit. He told me, while standing by my side at the identification parade, "*The police keep visiting me regularly.*" I told him jokingly:

"Why don't you tell them that Sir Andrew Frazer was the chief patron of the secret society - that should make their persistence worth its while". Gossain responded: "I have indeed said something on these very lines. I have told them that Surendranath Banerji is our head and that I had once shown him a bomb." I was staggered at this disclosure and asked him: "Was there any need of saying such a thing?" Gossain responded: "I will send these ... to an early grave. I have said many things on these lines. They will perish in trying to find corroboration. Who knows, the trial might be held up because of this." I only said this in response: "You should give up this kind of mischief. If you try to be too clever with them, you will end up being deceived yourself." I do not know the degree of truth in Gossain's words. The general belief amongst the accused was that Gossain was trying to mislead us by saying all this. My own sense was that Gossain had not yet committed himself to the idea of turning an 'approver'. Although he was leaning more and more in that direction, he also nurtured hopes of damaging the Police case by misleading them. The ones of a wicked disposition are naturally inclined to achieve their ends through deception and dishonesty. I gathered that the Police now held sway over Gossain and he would say or do anything under their influence to save his own skin. The degradation of a base nature to lower levels through even more ignoble acts, was enacted before our very eyes like the acts of a play. I noticed the changes in Gossain's mental make-up, his appearance, his expression and mannerisms and even in his speech. He would from time to time offer various economic and

political justifications for his treacherous designs. It is not very often that one can watch the unfolding of such an interesting psychological study.

At first we did not let Gossain know that his deception lay exposed to us. He too was stupid enough not to realize this for quite some time and imagined that he was helping the police in complete secrecy. But after a few days, orders were passed that we were all to be kept together instead of keeping some of us separately in solitary confinement. In this new arrangement, where people could mix and converse freely with each other it was very difficult to keep anything secret for long. During this phase, quarrels broke out between Gossain and a couple of the boys; Gossain was able to gather from their words and the generally unpleasant treatment from everyone around that his deception was no longer a secret. Later on, when he gave his evidence before the court, some English newspapers reported that this unexpected event had caused surprise and excitement amongst the accused. Needless to say, this was entirely the reporters' imagination. Everyone had realized well in advance the manner and nature of evidence that would be provided in court. In fact, even the date on which the evidence would be given was known to us. During this time, an accused went to Gossain and said - *"Look, brother, life here is intolerable. I too would like to turn an 'approver'. Please tell Shamsul Alam to arrange for my release."* Gossain agreed to this and after a few days, informed him that a government letter had been issued to the effect that a favourable consideration of the said convict's request was likely. Gossain then

asked him to eke out some important information related to the location of the branches of the secret society and the identity of its leaders etcetera from Upen and the others. The make-believe 'approver' was a fun-loving person with a sense of humour; he provided, in consultation with Upendra, a set of imaginary names to Gossain as the said leaders of the secret society: Vishambhar Pillay in Madras, Purushottam Natekar at Satara, Professor Bhatt in Bombay and Krishnajirao Bhao of Baroda. Gossain was suitably delighted and conveyed this reliable information to the police. The police on their part searched every nook and cranny of Madras, and found many Pillays, of various shapes and sizes, but discovered none that answered to Pillay Vishambhar or even half of Vishambhar; as for Satara's Purushottam Natekar, his existence remained shrouded in secrecy; in Bombay a certain Professor Bhatt was discovered, but he turned out to be a harmless person, loyal to the Crown and with no possibility of dealings with any secret society. Yet Gossain's evidence, built upon hearsay from Upen, made use of the imaginary Vishambhar Pillay and other such ringleaders of conspiracy as a sacrificial offering at the holy feet of Norton and nourished his imaginative prosecution theory. The police created further mystery around Bir Krishnajirao Bhao. They produced the copy of a telegram sent to Krishnajirao Deshpande of Baroda by a said "*Ghose*" from the Manicktola Gardens. The people of Baroda could never discover the existence of one answering to that name, but since the truthful Gossain had spoken of a Krishnajirao Bhao of Baroda,

then surely Krishnajirao Bhao and Krishnajirao Deshpande must be the one and same person. And it hardly mattered if Krishnajirao Deshpande existed in reality; as the name of our respected friend, Keshavrao Deshpande was discovered in my correspondence, hence it could not but be that Krishnajirao Bhao, Krishnajirao Deshpande and Keshavrao Deshpande referred to the same person. Therefore it was proven that Keshavrao Deshpande was a ringleader of the secret conspiracy. It was on the basis of such extraordinary inferences that Mr. Norton had postulated his infamous theory of prosecution.

If Gossain's version were to be accepted, then it was at his instance that our solitary confinement was done away with and we were ordered to stay together. He said that the police had made this arrangement to help him stay in the midst of fellow convicts and obtain secret information related to the conspiracy from them. Gossain was unaware that everyone already knew of his new business and continued asking many questions like who were engaged in the conspiracy, the locations of the branches of the secret society, the identity of the patrons and financial contributors, the identity of those who would now be in charge of the secret society etcetera. I have already given examples of the kind of responses he received. But a majority of Gossain's assertions turned out to be untrue. Dr. Daly had informed us that it was he who had brought about this change in our accommodations by persuading Emerson sahib. It is possible that Daly's version was the correct one and on being informed about the

change, the police may have sought to benefit from the new arrangement in the manner Gossain had described. Be as it may, everyone welcomed this change except me; I was reluctant to be in the company of other men, as my *sadhana* was progressing rapidly during that period. I had had a fore-taste of *samata* (equality), desirelessness and Peace, but these states had not yet been established. I was apprehensive that in the company of other men, if my nascent condition was pre-maturely exposed to their thought-waves, then the new consciousness may diminish and even be subsumed. In fact that is exactly what happened. I was unable to understand then that for the completeness of my realization it was necessary to raise the opposite state to its maximum. Hence the *Antaryamin* (Inner Guide) suddenly brought me out of solitude and flung me into an overpowering stream of outward activity. The rest of the group however found it difficult to contain their joy. That night everyone gathered in the largest room, in which singers like Hemchandra Das, Sachindra Sen were already resident and no one slept till two or three in the morning. That night, the silent prison reverberated with the ring of laughter, the endless stream of songs and the pent-up stories that were flowing like flooded rivers in the rainy season. We fell asleep but every time we woke up, we heard the laughter, the singing, the conversation continuing unabated. In the early hours of the morning the stream thinned out, the singers too fell asleep and our wards fell silent.

SRI AUROBINDO MEMORIAL COURT ROOM



IN THIS ROOM WAS HELD
IN 1908-1909.
THE HISTORIC TRIAL OF FIGHTERS
FOR
INDIA'S EMANCIPATION
INCLUDING
SRI AUROBINDO,
THE PROPHET OF LIFE DIVINE.

"HE WILL BE LOOKED UPON AS THE POET OF
PATRIOTISM, THE PROPHET OF NATIONALISM
AND THE LOVER OF HUMANITY. HIS WORDS WILL
BE ECHOED AND RE-ECHOED, NOT ONLY IN INDIA,
BUT ACROSS THE DISTANT SEAS AND LANDS"

SRI CHITTARANJAN DAS
COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE.

DESCRIPTIVE ROLL

1. Name and alias *Azabmole Thos*
 2. Father's name *D. K. D. Ghose.*
 3. Village *Gishikaria*
 4. Police station *Konmangra*
 5. District *Hooghly*
 6. Caste *Hindu - Bengali.*
 7. Occupation
 8. Age *37 yrs.*
 9. Height *5' 6 1/2".*
 10. Build *Slim*
 11. Hair
 12. Complexion *medium.*
 13. Eyes *dark - Spectacles*
 14. Nose
 15. Mouth
 16. Chin
 17. Ears *mole right ear.*
 18. Forehead
 19. Beard
 20. Moustache *band in chin*
 21. Marks and scars *2 moles in back.*



Convictions.

No.	District.	Court.	Date.	Section.	Term.	Police Officer to identify.
1st	<i>Alipore</i>	<i>Sessions</i>	<i>6.5.09</i>		<i>acquitted</i>	
2nd	<i>24 Parg.</i>					
3rd						
4th						
5th						
6th						
7th						
8th						
9th						
10th						
11th						
12th						

1. Certified that the convictions noted on this Finger Impression Slip have been recorded from the Magistrate's General Register of cases and the Conviction Register, and that they are correct in all particulars.

2. Certified that the convictions noted on this Finger Impression Slip have been verified from the Jail Admission Register, Warrant of Incarceration and the History Ticket of the prisoner.

Name in full and rank of officer
preparing the slip.

Name in full and rank of officer
testing the slip.

Impressions taken by

Rank

District

Tested by

Rank

District

Place

Date

Classified at Head Office by

Rank

Date

Tested at Head Office by

Rank

Date

[J. Press—A 43—13-4-1207—200—47,300—20]

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The End

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